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"CATCH ME IF YOU CAN, SLOW-COACH!" HE SHOUTED.

Lance and Lasso; OR, THE CHILDREN OF THE CHACO.

A Tale of Four Boys' Summer Vacation
on the Pampas of Buenos Ayres.

BY CAPT. FREDERICK WHITTAKER,
AUTHOR OF "THE WILD-HORSE HUNTERS," "THE SEA-
CAT," "THE DUMB PAGE," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE FOUR COMRADES.

Four lads, ranging from fourteen to seventeen years of age, were sitting on their trunks in one of the dormitories of the "Tusculum Military Academy," discussing a grave project.

"Now, fellows," said Jack Curtis, the eldest but one, "you know to-morrow's our last day in school. Two of us are going away for good and all from the old shebang, and won't eat any more of old Wolcott's spider puddings. Now, why can't you two other fellows get your folks to send you with us? It'll be prime fun, you bet! and if you must come back to school at the end of the holidays, at least you'll have a better time than you ever had before. Manuel's father says he'd like to take the whole school with him. My father says I can go, and I guess we can get your folks to consent. What d'ye say?"

"My father wouldn't let me," sighed Louis Ledoux, the little black-eyed, curly-headed Louisianian. (The boys all called him "Kitty," from his soft ways and delicate face.) "He says I'm not strong enough; and mother declares she'll keep me home till I'm twenty. Hey! fellows, isn't it a shame? Guess I'll run away, when you fellows go."

Tom Bullard, who was whittling out a boat with his knife, looked up. The boys all called him "Plug."

"You hain't got spunk enough, Kitty," he remarked, dryly. "As for me, I hain't got no one to keepr what I do, and I'm a-goin' with Manuel and Jack. If my uncle hears of it, guess he'll be glad to let me go. 'Twon't cost him much. But this runnin' away ain't what it's cracked out to be. What a lammin' the old feller gave me once, for tryin' it on!"

Tom Bullard was a Western boy, an orphan, in charge of an uncle, who owned a great "ranch" in Southern Kansas.

Tom had learned to ride almost before he could remember, and his greatest trial at school was having no horse, for, like all boys, he loved a horse. He was rather short, but very broad and sturdy. He was a quiet fellow, too; you seldom heard of his fighting. But, for all that, he was feared by the bullies of the school, none of whom liked to meddle with "Plug." Of course there was a reason for this. No boy ever gets feared by a bully without having done something to deserve it; and Plug's reputation dated from his celebrated battle with "Dutchy."

Now, "Dutchy" was a big, overgrown lout of a boy, of German parents. His real name was Charley Alker, and he was in the habit of bullying the smaller boys unmercifully, being stronger than they. A boy who does that generally turns out to be a coward, when he is set on by his equals; and so it proved with Charley Alker.

One day Tom heard a great noise, and found "Dutchy" beating little Louis Ledoux with a baseball bat, while poor "Kitty" was crying bitterly. Without a single word, "Plug" flew at Alker, who was a head taller than himself, snatched the bat from him, threw it away, and then "sailed into Dutchy," rough-and-tumble fashion. Before Alker knew where he was, the Western lad had him on his back, and punished him in such style that "Dutchy" was compelled to scream for mercy.

That was Tom's first and last battle, and so badly was Alker beaten that he had to be put to bed for a

week. After that, every bully fought shy of old "Plug." "Kitty" Ledoux, for his part, absolutely adored him, from the day of the battle.

Manuel Garcia was the eldest of the group. The boys called him "Father Wiseman," on account of his grave ways. Manuel was head boy of the school, and was nearly six feet high at eighteen. He had a dark, handsome face, with black eyes, and his mustache was just beginning to sprout, which rendered him an object of great envy to Jack Curtis, who was seventeen. Jack also had a little down on his upper lip, but it was so light in color that no one noticed it, although Jack did his best to call attention to it by constantly caressing the few hairs that he called a mustache. Manuel's mustache, on the other hand, was undeniable, and he was obliged to shave his chin three times a week, whereas Jack hardly dared to go to the barber's, for fear of being laughed at.

Manuel was the son of a rich Spanish gentleman. He was born in New York, and was, therefore, much more of an American than a Spaniard. Don Luis Garcia, his father, after making considerable money in the South American trade, had settled in Buenos Ayres, where he had bought an immense *estancia*, or grazing farm, upon which were thousands of cattle and horses. Every year Don Luis dispatched cargoes of hides and tallow to New York, frequently coming on himself to superintend the sales. Jack Curtis's father was his New York agent, and at the time we open our story, Don Luis was in New York at Mr. Curtis's house, preparing to return to Buenos Ayres. It being so close to the holidays, and Manuel and Jack being about to leave school for good, Don Luis had given his son permission to invite as many of his schoolmates as could come on a trip to Buenos Ayres, and hence the discussion going on in Dormitory No. 17, Tusculum Military Academy.

Jack Curtis was a strong, well-grown lad, full of fun and frolic, and always in scrapes. He was forever sticking crooked pins in Dr. Wolcott's chair, putting mice in the old gentleman's desk to see him start when they jumped out, and all such tricks, for every one of which he was regularly lectured by the Doctor. In fact, all or nearly all the mischief that was done in the school was laid on Jack's shoulders, and he was so perpetually in trouble that he had acquired from every one the name of "Pickle." During the last few weeks, however, Jack had been much quieter. The idea of leaving school, and becoming a man, had toned him down. For at least a fortnight "Pickle" had not been in any trouble.

As for "Kitty" Ledoux, he was too gentle and good to get into disgrace, even at Tusculum, which had the reputation of being the strictest school on the Hudson. It was called a "Military Academy," because the boys dressed in uniform, and were drilled in the movements of soldiers.

"I'll tell you what to do, Kitty," said Manuel Garcia, speaking for the first time. "Your father and mine are well acquainted in business, and I'll get mine to intercede for you, to let you come with us."

"Why should not we all write a letter?" suggested Curtis. "We'll make a regular round robin of it, like the sailors do, and get my father to send a letter along with it."

"Pickle's right," said Bullard, quietly. "Let's get it up at once."

It doesn't take boys long to come to a conclusion. "Kitty" jumped up from his trunk, opened it, and produced the pretty little writing-desk, his mother's gift, which he had kept unopened, when all the other fellows had smashed theirs. "Now, fellows," he said, "how shall we begin?"

"Write what I tell you," said Garcia, "and you'll see I'll bring you out all right. Begin—My dear father—"

"But ain't we all going to write together?" suggested "Kitty." "He ain't your father, you know."

"Go on," said Garcia. "Didn't I tell you I'd bring you out all right?"

So Kitty wrote as he was told:

"My dear father," dictated Garcia; "to-morrow begins the holidays, and I have an invitation to spend them with my room-mate, Manuel Garcia, whose father, you know, is Don Luis Garcia, of Buenos Ayres. Manuel has asked several other fellows, and their fathers all say they may go. Please let me go, too, father. Manuel says I can have all the horses I want, and he'll teach me how to ride, and it sha'n't cost me anything, because we're to go on his father's ship, and stay at their place, outside of Buenos Ayres. Give my best love to mother, and believe me, your affectionate son,

"LOUIS LEDOUX."

"He'll never let me go on that," said Louis, doubtfully.

"Where were you to spend the holidays?" asked Bullard, suddenly.

"At aunt Louisa's, in New York," answered the boy.

"Don't see why he should object," said Bullard, gruffly. "I'm not going to ask uncle John at all. I'm going to write and tell him I'm going from New York."

Bullard was a queer, independent boy. He and his uncle only saw each other at the summer holidays, when the uncle sent him money to take him out West to the ranch, and paid his school-bills through an agent in New York. At the shorter vacations, Bullard went to visit his different comrades, or staid in the school, with one or two other forlorn ones. He always traveled alone, and never came to harm.

"Kitty" was differently situated. He had relations in New York, as well as in New Orleans, and his parents came to see him, generally at summer

vacation. This year they had sent word that business detained Mr. Ledoux, and that Louis was to spend the vacation at his aunt Louisa's, which he hated to do, as there were no boys at her house. It was this more than any thing that made him long to go with his friend Garcia.

"Give me the desk," said Garcia, suddenly. "I'll write a postscript."

He scribbled away for some minutes, and then remarked:

"How's this, boys? 'Mr. Manuel Garcia presents his compliments to Mr. Ledoux, and assures him that he will take just as good care of Louis as aunt Louisa, or any other man. He hopes Mr. Ledoux will let Louis go to the estancia, as it will do him good and make a man of him.' MANUEL GARCIA."

"Now, Plug, you take a turn," remarked Garcia, handing the desk to Tom Bullard.

"Plug" took the desk, and wrote a few words, which he read aloud:

"Please let Kitty go with us. He's a good little fellow, and I'll take care of him. Yours truly, "T. BULLARD."

"Good for you, Plug," said Curtis; "now let me have a try: 'Dear Sir: Tom Bullard, Garcia and I are going to Buenos Ayres next week, and we want Louis to go with us. We'll take good care of him, and bring him back safe if you'll only let him go. Yours very respectfully, JOHN CURTIS.'"

"Now, fellows," said Garcia, putting the letter into an envelope, "that's done, and I'll take it to the post, right off. To-night we'll have a rousing time, and to-morrow we'll bid farewell to cold hash, fish-balls, suet pudding, stale pumpkin pies, and old Wolcott, altogether. I'll tell my father, when he comes, if ever he has another boy, never to send him to Tusculum, if he doesn't want him to eat flies and spiders, boiled up in the plum pudding. Good-by."

And Master Manuel went off down the passage, whistling.

CHAPTER II.

HOW IT ALL HAPPENED.

A FEW days later, three of our four friends were seated together once more, but in a different place. It was in Mr. Curtis's parlor in New York. Mrs. Curtis was there, and Louis Ledoux's aunt Louisa, with Jack's sister, Ellen Curtis, and Louis's cousin, Mary Seaton, both young ladies of nearly eighteen.

Old "Plug" was not visible. He had gone out for a walk all by himself, in his usual independent style, and had not been seen since breakfast.

Manuel Garcia was talking to Mrs. Curtis, and Jack was very busy in a corner whispering with Mary Seaton. Poor "Kitty" was the only gloomy looking member of the party. He had not yet received an answer to his letter to his father, and began to fear he would not get the desired permission. His aunt Louisa and Ellen Curtis were both trying to comfort him, in different fashions.

"If I were you, Louis," said Mrs. Seaton, "I wouldn't be cast down about it. Even if your father won't let you go, you can have a nice time with us. Mary and I are going to Long Branch, and you can have all the sea-bathing you want. Indeed, I think it would be very dangerous to let you go away down among all the wild beasts in South America. You're not old enough, yet."

"I'm not afraid of wild beasts," said Louis, valiantly. "If I don't go with Plug and Pickle I don't want to go anywhere. So there," said Louis.

And "Kitty" looked as sullen as he was able to look. While they were talking, they heard the sound of a key turning in the hall door, and Ellen jumped up, exclaiming:

"There's papa, Louis! Who knows? Perhaps he has a letter for you."

Louis brightened up at this, and followed Ellen to the door and into the passage, where two gentlemen were hanging up their hats on the rack. One of them was a stout, middle-aged gentleman, with a bald head and mutton-chop whiskers. This was Mr. Curtis. The other was a tall and remarkably handsome gentleman, with a dark, sunburned face, and long, drooping mustache, as black as a coal. It did not need Ellen's cordial greeting to convince Louis that this was Manuel's father, Don Luis Garcia. "Kitty" had not yet seen him, for he had been at his aunt Louisa's since he left school, and Mrs. Seaton had discouraged his going to see his friends, as she did not believe that the elder Ledoux would let Louis go, and she did not want him to be disappointed by false hopes.

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Curtis, kindly; "do you know this is Don Luis, your namesake? Don Luis, this is the little fellow that's so anxious to go with you to Buenos Ayres—Mr. Ledoux's son."

"And you are the 'Kitty' that Manuel and Jack so often talk about, are you?" said Don Luis, looking at "Kitty" with some interest. "Well, my boy, don't you think that you're almost too young to go all that distance alone? Suppose you were to fall sick, so far from home?"

"Oh, please, sir, I never get sick," said Louis, eagerly. "If father will only let me go, I shall be so happy."

"Well, then," said Mr. Curtis, smiling, "suppose I was to say that your father won't hear of it, what then?"

Louis did not answer. His heart was too full. He just turned away silently, with tears in his eyes, and sat down in the drawing-room by Ellen Curtis's side.

"Poor lad," said Don Luis, to Mr. Curtis, in a low voice; "you shouldn't have said that, Curtis. Now he'll have a crying time."

As they went into the drawing-room, Mrs. Curtis

rose to welcome her husband, and Jack jumped up, crying:

"Hey, father, is Kitty to go with us yet? Poor little chap, he'll cry his eyes out if he don't."

Mr. Curtis made no answer immediately, till his wife rung for dinner, when he said:

"Boys, I had a letter from Mr. Ledoux to-day."

Up jumped Louis in a moment, all eagerness.

"Oh, please, Mr. Curtis, what did he say?"

Don Luis Garcia turned round from where he was talking to Mrs. Seaton.

"Don't tease him any more, Curtis," he said, laughing. "Let him know, Louis, your father says that you can go, if I will be responsible for you. How is it, my boy—do you think that you will give me much trouble?"

Louis could hardly speak for joy.

"Oh, indeed, Mr. Garcia, I'll be so good," he stammered; "then turning to Jack, cried: 'Oh, Pickle, I'm going, I'm going!'"

"But where is our young friend, Bullard?" asked Don Luis, as he looked round. "He's a peculiar boy, and I enjoy talking to him wonderfully. Where is he, Manuel?"

"He went out, saying he was going to see Mr. Bixby, and we've not seen him since."

"He's a very strange lad," remarked Mrs. Seaton, with a slight shiver. "I noticed him once playing with a huge knife, and asked him what he was doing. 'Practicin' how to slip it into a feller's in'ards,' he answered, in the most cold-blooded manner. I declare, Don Luis, I should feel afraid to trust him with the rest, he's such a queer, outlandish boy."

Don Luis laughed.

"Oh, he won't hurt his friends, madam. It's only his sense of humor that carries him away sometimes."

"Plug's the best-hearted fellow in the world," said "Kitty," indignantly. "I wonder you can talk that way, aunt Louisa. Didn't he thrash Dutchy when he was lamming me with the base-ball bat? Plug is a regular brick. We wouldn't go if it wasn't for him."

"Dear me, dear me, Louis," said his aunt, holding up her hands, "where do you learn such language, I wonder? Who's Dutchy, and what do you mean by a regular brick?"

"Dutchy's big Charley Alker, and I guess you'd have called old Plug a brick if you'd seen him giving it to Dutch," said Louis, enthusiastically. "Why, aunt, he bunged up both his eyes so he couldn't see out of 'em, and most broke his left arm. I guess Master Dutch had to leave me alone after that whipping."

"Well, of all the boys!" said aunt Louisa, with a sigh. "I wonder where you learned to talk so. I shall have to write to your father not to let you go away. I'm afraid that you'll get ruder than ever if you go to South America."

"No, I won't," said Louis. "You'll see, I'll be as quiet as can be, once I get away from these girls, teasing me and keeping me straight all the time."

And Louis looked scornfully at the two girls; but at that moment the door opened, and the servant announced that dinner was ready. Close behind her came a broad, sturdy figure that was hardly recognized by any of them at first, till Curtis cried out:

"Why, Plug, where have you been, and what have you been doing?"

"Plug" grinned, but made no answer, till he had unloaded himself of a whole armory of weapons, which he laid on the table.

"Been to see Bixby," he finally said, as he laid out a two-foot bowie-knife, a navy revolver, a repeating rifle, and a big cartridge-box, alongside of each other.

Aunt Louisa backed away in great trepidation from the table, saying:

"Good heavens, Mr. Curtis, how can you allow such dangerous playthings in your house? I hope they're not loaded, Mr. Bullard."

Tom grinned again.

"Every one of 'em, ma'am. You'd better keep away from the muzzles."

"Which end is that?" asked the lady, nervously eying the weapons. "Will they go off alone?"

"They're not apt to, ma'am," said Plug, coolly, "unless you happen to cock 'em and pull the trigger. They're just built to shoot, they are!"

"Busters! What is that, Mr. Tom?" asked the lady, innocently.

"Rippers, ma'am; ring-tailed squealers; a hull team and a boss to spare, with a yaller dawg hitched under the waggin." And Tom allowed the end of his tongue to bulge out one cheek, as he turned away to Jack Curtis.

Tom was decidedly rude, but he had been brought up in a rough school, before he went to Tusculum Academy, and retained much of his native slang.

"But where have you been, Tom?" asked Don Luis, who had listened to Mrs. Seaton and Plug with some amusement.

Plug straightened up respectfully in a moment.

"Went to see Mr. Bixby, sir, uncle John's agent. Got him to telegraph for me to Kansas. Got this answer, sir."

Tom held out a piece of paper, on which was written a line of writing. Don Luis examined it and couldn't help laughing. It was from Tom's queer old bachelor uncle out in Kansas, evidently in answer to some request of Tom's.

It ran thus:

"MR. BIXBY: Let him have a thousand dollars and go. JOHN BULLARD."

"And so, first thing I did was to go and get the weepins," said Tom, quietly; "and then I made tracks for here, to be in time for dinner."

"What a tunny boy he is!" whispered aunt Louisa to Don Luis, as they slowly proceeded to the dining-

room. "Sometimes I feel afraid of him, with his queer ways."

"Poor boy!" said Don Luis, with a slight sigh. "He has no father or mother to teach him good manners. We must remember that. My boy has no mother; and when I look at the two, I often think how God has been good in sparing me so long to take care of Manuel, till he is old enough to take care of himself. Tom Bullard is a wonderfully fine fellow, considering the way in which he has literally tumbled up, rather than been brought up."

And a few minutes after they were all busy at dinner, in the course of which they found out that Mr. Ledoux had written a long letter to Mr. Curtis about Louis. Mr. Ledoux was a great sugar-planter of Louisiana, and Mr. Curtis was his agent, as well as Don Luis Garcia. One sent him sugar, the other sent hides and tallow, and he sold cargoes for both. To-day he had received news from Mr. Ledoux, a second time.

"He says, boys, that he received your letter, and if Don Luis is willing to take charge of you all, and will be responsible for your safety, he has no objection. He has also told me to see that you are properly fitted out, Master Louis, and to that end I am to get all that is necessary, and charge it to him. Are you satisfied?"

"Kitty" was almost too happy to answer. "And what did you write to your uncle, Master Tom?" asked Don Luis of "Plug," who was quietly eating his dinner beside Mrs. Curtis.

"Telegraphed that I wanted to go to Buenos Ayres, and wanted money to go," said Plug, laconically.

"Well," said Don Luis, smiling, "your uncle seems to have perfect confidence in you, from his answer."

"Why shouldn't he?" said Tom, quietly. "I never give him any trouble; and if I get into musses, I get out of them alone. That's the way to get on with uncle John."

"Well, boys," said Mr. Curtis, "now that it's all settled, you'll have to make your preparations at once. The Bonita sails on Monday next, and to-day is Wednesday. Don't go to getting any more guns and pistols, Master Bullard, for you won't need them in Buenos Ayres. It's not such a wild place as you think."

"The best thing you can do, boys," said Don Luis, "is to come with me to-morrow, and I'll show you what you'll want. Then you won't waste your money."

And so it was settled; and the next day saw our boys, with Don Luis, going from store to store, purchasing heavy coats for sea, strong trousers for riding, weapons, and every thing else except saddles and bridles. Don Luis told them that they would not need those, as there were plenty at Buenos Ayres.

CHAPTER III.

GOING TO SEA.

On a broiling hot morning in July, the good ship Bonita lay alongside the wharf in the North river, while our four boys stood on the quarter-deck, with Don Luis, waving their handkerchiefs to a group of ladies in a carriage on the wharf. Outside, in the dock between the wharves, a little black steam-tug was puffing and blowing, as she backed out, at the end of a long rope, under whose influence the Bonita began slowly to move away from the shore.

"Kitty" Ledoux's face was not without a trace of sadness on it. After all, he was very fond of his Aunt Louisa, who was exceedingly kind; and he was leaving her for no one knew how long.

Jack Curtis, too, was going away from father and mother, and although he would not have stayed behind, still, the sight of their grief at parting affected him sensibly.

Manuel Garcia seemed to be not altogether happy, either, though he was with his father. The fact was, that Manuel, with his handsome face and dark eyes, had been greatly taken with Jack's sister, Ellen Curtis, and almost felt inclined to give up his voyage, to remain with the blue eyes and sunny curls of the pretty New York girl. But it would never do to confess this; so Manuel hid his feelings away, along with a lock of hair that came from his adored one, which he kept in a pretty gold locket.

The only thoroughly happy one of the party was old "Plug." Tom had commenced sailor's life as soon as he got on board, and was already perched on top of the sparker boom, with his legs dangling, while he whistled "A Life on the Ocean Wave," with the full power of his lungs.

Don Luis was waving his hat, and the Bonita glided slowly out of the dock and into the stream, where the intervening vessels soon shut out the view of the people on shore.

Now they saw the wharves full of shipping gliding by rapidly, while their course was constantly crossed by the great ferryboats to Hoboken and Jersey City, the rival steam tugs shot up and down at either side. Then there were numbers of sloops and schooners, with their white sails swelling out to the wind, the foam dashing up under their bows, as they plowed through the waters. In a little while the black steam-tug backed water, taking in the long rope as she did so, and came alongside of the Bonita, when she was secured to her at bow and stern, with strong fastenings, after which they steamed ahead once more. Now the captain of the Bonita who had been down in the forward part of the vessel, came back to the quarter-deck, and began to shout orders to the sailors through a black speaking-trumpet that he held in his hand.

The novelty of everything interested our boys, and soon made them forget their sober feelings at parting. With Don Luis, they took their seats on the extreme end of the vessel, which is called the taffrail,

and watched everything going on with great interest. Even Manuel knew but little of the sea.

As for Jack and "Kitty," to them it was all new, and the latter never wearied of asking questions of his kind friend, Don Luis.

"Please, sir, why does the boat come up to us instead of dragging us?" was his first question.

"Because we are going out through a narrow and crooked channel," said the Don. "There are places in it where it turns sharp round, and where the water on each side is quite shallow. Now, if we were to keep at the end of our tow-rope, we might swing quite out of the channel, and stick in the mud in one of these places, whereas, if we keep close to the tug, we both go where she does."

"But how do you know where the channel is?" asked "Kitty."

Don Luis pointed to a man standing near the captain, who every now and then spoke a word to the latter.

"That man is the pilot," he said. "It is his business to take vessels in and out, and he does nothing else all the time. The edges of the channel are marked by buoys."

"Kitty" stared and laughed. "By boys, Don Luis! Oh, you're fooling, ain't you?"

Don Luis laughed also.

"Well, well, my lad, the buoy I mean is a different kind of boy. A buoy—b-u-o-y—is a small keg, or a float of some kind, which is fastened to a rope or chain, the other end anchored to a rock. The buoy floats on top of the water, and marks the rock underneath. There is a row of buoys on each side of this New York channel, as soon as it gets narrow. So you see we have to go between them to be safe, and the pilot knows, from long experience, just where to look for them."

"How long does he stay with us, sir?" asked Jack Curtis.

"Till we get outside Sandy Hook," responded Don Luis. "Then he leaves us and goes to his own vessel, one of those pretty schooners that you see, now and then, with the huge number on her mainsail. Those are the pilot-boats."

This brought inquisitive "Kitty" to the front with a new question. He had been brought up away from the sea, and actually knew hardly anything about vessels. But he had made up his mind to know all he could get out of Don Luis; and the good-natured estanciero was a good deal of a sailor. The Bonita belonged to him, and he frequently made voyages in her; so that he had acquired considerable knowledge of seamanship.

"Please, Don Luis," said "Kitty," "as the estanciero spoke of the pilot boats; 'what kind of a ship do you call that?' and he pointed to a low black vessel with one mast, and enormous sails that went skimming past them, swift as an arrow, as they came abreast of Governor's Island."

"That's a sloop yacht, my boy," said the estanciero; "that is, a vessel meant for nothing but pleasure-sailing and sport, sloop-rigged."

"And what's sloop-rigged?" asked "Kitty."

"We call vessels with one mast sloops," said Don Luis. "You see that one has one mast, and a big sail that goes from the front to the rear, what we call fore and aft. Above that she has a triangular sail, called a gaff topsail, and two more in front called jibs. That's a sloop. Yonder vessel with two masts, and the same kind of sails, is a schooner. Now look at our own vessel. You see she has three masts, and that all her sails are fastened to sticks going across the vessel, not fore and aft. Those sticks are called yards, the sails square-sails, and our own vessel, is a true ship. Remember, that everything you see afloat, from a boat to a man-of-war, is a vessel, but nothing is a ship that has not got three masts, and is not square-rigged on all. A square-rigged vessel with two masts is called a brig."

"But why do they have so many different kinds of ships—vessels I mean, sir?" asked Jack Curtis. "Why shouldn't they be all of one kind?"

As he spoke, the captain shouted out some orders; and the men who had gone up on the yards let go some ropes, when down fell the white sheets of canvas in graceful festoons, swelling out under the favorable breeze that blew from the coast of Jersey.

Don Luis pointed to a schooner that was just crossing their bows to go up the river. She was laid over by the breeze, till her copper showed for several feet, and was struggling hard against a head tide.

"See yonder schooner," he said. "She was built expressly for going up and down our broad American rivers, where the wind is sure to be contrary to just one-half of the vessels, going in opposite directions. What she needs is a rig to enable her to go slanting to and fro from side to side, what is called 'beating up' and 'tacking.' Her sails set themselves, you see, and swing round from one tack to the other, alone. All she needs is a man at the helm, and another to 'tend jib, as it is called. Now our ship is meant to go in stormy seas, where she may have to take in her sails bit by bit. Consequently you see there are a great number of them, so that we may be always be easily able to find out how much she can stand. And then, another point. Our ship is meant to go before the wind, or on one tack, for very long periods, and these square sails send a ship much faster before the wind than those fore-and-aft ones. Look there. See that other schooner that we are overtaking, though she goes the same way that we do. She is going before the wind, and see how her sails swing out on each side. That is called going 'wing and wing.' A square-rigged ship can almost always beat a schooner at that, as we are bent by them in short tacks. So you see there's a reason for schooners and another."

for ships, and so also for all other kinds of vessels. People wouldn't build them in different ways if they didn't find it pay them."

Here the Don broke off in his lecture, to point out the shores of Staten Island, and a shoal of porpoises playing in the waves, between them and the shore.

"We shall see plenty of those out at sea," he said. "Those are porpoises, which the French and Germans call sea pigs. They look something like them, and their flesh is very similar to pork."

Louis was delighted with the sight of the porpoises, as they came to the surface of the sea with a grand rush, described a graceful curve in air, and then went down again to parts unknown, leaving the spray glittering in the bright sunshine.

Now the breeze began to freshen, as they passed through the Narrows and emerged into the lower bay. The sailors began to come down from the yards, where now all the sails were hanging in festoons, thundering and flapping loudly. In a few minutes afterward the tug cast off her fastenings, the sailors on deck seized hold of the long ropes called "sheets," which run from the lower courses of all the sails, and stretched the great squares of white canvas tight between the yards. Then the Bonita bowed over her lofty masts as she felt the canvas, and away she went, with her head pointed toward the blue line of sea, between Sandy Hook and Coney Island, the white foam parting under her cutwater.

The Bonita was a fast ship, and every stitch of canvas was soon spread. The breeze was from the north-west and therefore favorable for her. Soon the boys noticed some men out on the ends of the yards, pushing out some long, slender sticks through rings at the yard-arms on each side. The captain of the Bonita, whose name was Gregson, was standing near by, as Louis asked him:

"Please, captain, what are those men doing?"

"Rigging out stu'n sail booms," said the captain, and turned away, for he didn't want to be bothered just then. Don Luis beckoned to "Kitty."

"You mustn't talk to the captain till you get out to sea," he said. "A captain is always anxious about his vessel when there are rocks or shoals around, and never feels safe till out of sight of land. What do you want to know?"

Louis repeated his question about the studding-sail booms, and Don Luis told him:

"You see the breeze is very light yet, and we want to take advantage of it, so we rig out those booms, and presently you'll see them send up the sails from on deck."

And sure enough, in a short time after, first one sail and then another was fastened to long, thin ropes, and hauled up to the ends of the studding-sail or stu'n sail booms, till there was a cloud of canvas on the ship, under which her hull looked like a speck. In less than an hour afterward, the pilot was on his way shoreward, and the Bonita, under all sail, was heading south-eastwardly toward the distant coast of Africa.

CHAPTER IV.

OCEAN LIFE.

BEFORE they had gone many miles outside of Sandy Hook, the breeze freshened to a considerable wind, and the ship leaped along like a live thing, going at a tremendous pace, for she was very sharp and swift, of the build called clipper.

But if the Bonita sailed fast and looked pretty, she also began to roll and pitch considerably, and with very distressing effects to our boys. First of all "Kitty" gave in, and became terribly sea-sick. Don Luis sent him down to his cabin, and poor Louis was soon on his back in his berth, wishing that some one would only put him ashore, and that he had never come to sea. "Pickle" and "Plug" stood it out bravely together for some time, each taunting the other with being sick at first, but it was no use. All the jokes they could muster wouldn't keep off the enemy; and first, "Pickle" and then "Plug" became awfully sick. Jack Curtis went below, but old "Plug" declared he wouldn't go down while he could stand; so he kept the deck, miserable as he was; and, as soon as the first attack was over, he drank something which Don Luis gave him, and felt much better; and the end of it was that Tom, by sheer pluck, beat the sea-sickness and staid on deck till sunset. Manuel and his father were both exempt, the latter from having been on so many voyages, the former being one of the few fortunate ones who never get sea-sick.

So they bowed pleasantly along; and after a long night's sleep, the sick ones awoke in the morning, so much better, that they were able to enjoy the scene when they came on deck.

All around them, as far as the eye could see, was one blue, unbroken waste of ocean, bounded by a blue line, the horizon. Here and there in the extreme distance were a few white specks that they knew must be sails. The land was nowhere to be seen, and the ocean was curling in short, glittering waves, under the same fresh, cool breeze that had wafted them from Sandy Hook. The contrast between the dull, weltering heat on the docks, the day before, and the fresh, delightful coolness of the open sea, was wonderful. The sea-sickness of the boys was quite gone, for a time, and they enjoyed the scene greatly.

Louis, Jack and Manuel were sitting in chairs on the shady side of the quarter-deck, inquisitive "Kitty," as usual, asking questions, this time of Captain Gregson, who turned out to be a very kind, pleasant man, now that he was not busy. Don Luis was gone forward to smoke a cigar, and "Plug" was invisible for the time.

"Please, captain, how long will it be before we reach Buenos Ayres?" asked "Kitty."

"Well, in about six weeks, with good luck, young gentleman."

Louis had brought out a large school geography, with which he was trying to follow out the course he was to pursue.

"I suppose," he said, wisely, "we shall pass close by the West Indies and the mouth of the Amazon, captain, and keep close to South America all the way."

The captain smiled.

"We should be a long time getting there that way. First, we should meet the Gulf Stream, which would delay us. Next we should be pretty sure of contrary winds till we crossed the line, besides the chance of a hurricane in the West Indies; and lastly, that very current of the Amazon you speak of would put us out of our way several days. Where do you suppose we are heading now?"

Louis looked at the map.

"For Cape St. Roque," he said, confidently.

"Not a bit of it, my lad. For Cape Verd."

"But that's in Africa," said Jack Curtis. "Isn't that going out of our way?"

"No, for we shall most probably have constant breezes from the north-west till we get there. In this part of the Atlantic we look for that. After nearing Africa we cross the equator and get into the *Doldrums*, where it's always more or less calm. Still, we get out of that by the help of the African current, and then come into the South Atlantic Ocean, in the south-east trade-wind, which will carry us straight to Buenos Ayres without shifting a sail. So that, you see, though we go a greater distance, we save time, by having a fair wind all the way."

Here Captain Gregson turned away and looked up at the main-top.

"Who's that skylarking up there?" he called out.

The boys looked up, and beheld the well-known visage of Tom Bullard, looking over the edge of the top as he stood, holding on to a shroud.

"Plug," for all answer to the captain's question, took aim at Jack Curtis with a hickory nut which he had in his pocket, and struck him full on the top of the head, the nut bouncing off and taking Captain Gregson on the nose.

The captain started and looked angry for a moment. Then he laughed, and shook his fist at Tom, crying:

"I'll pay you for that, you scamp. Do you know what happens to green hands when they get up in the rigging for the first time?"

"No," said Tom, coolly. "Do they hurt 'em if they catch 'em, Cap?"

"You shall see," said the captain, laughing. "Here, Mr. Hutton, send a couple of the men up after that young gentleman, and make him pay his footing."

Mr. Hutton was the first mate, and he too began to laugh. It was evident to the boy, that something funny was to happen. They could see the sailors in the fore-castle looking up and laughing at each other, as they watched Tom.

"Here, Striker, and you Antonio, go after him," said the mate, still laughing; and immediately two of the sailors separated from the rest and ran to the main rigging, which they began to ascend.

One of them was a big, heavily-built Englishman, with broad shoulders and long legs. The boys had noticed him, on account of his great size and strength, when they came out of New York. Striker was a gloomy, somewhat sullen-looking man, with temper none of the best, but known as a first-rate hand, aloft. Antonio, his companion, was a dark, swarthy Italian of middle size, but very broad and compact.

As these two men commenced ascending the main-rigging, it was clear that they had some designs on Tom, for Striker wore a grim smile on his face, and Antonio was chattering Italian to a comrade on the deck below as fast as he could talk, sometimes pointing toward Tom.

The Western lad allowed them to come up a few rounds of the ladder, hardly seeming to understand, when Don Luis came out of the cabin door, and took in the situation at a glance.

"Away with you, Tom," he shouted, cheerily. "If those men catch you, they'll tie you up in the rigging till you pay them. Up to the cross-trees, quick!"

And then Tom started.

Now, "Plug" had not the least idea where the cross-trees were. He had not yet been long enough on a ship to know the names of things. But he knew that it was a case of "Catch me if you can," and although no sailor, Tom was what was better, under some circumstances. He was a skillful gymnast. Many a time in the old Tusculum Academy had Tom led the game of "Follow my leader" through the gymnasium, climbing up ladders with his hands, jumping over ropes, swinging over horizontal and parallel bars, and again playing leap-frog over the wooden horse. In a moment he was into the top-most rigging, and climbing rapidly up to the head of the mast, where two cross-pieces of timber, at the heel of the topgallant mast, seemed to him most like the "cross-trees." Don Luis directed him to.

Tom was right. They were the cross-trees, and he got there before the two sailors reached the top. A shout of encouragement from the deck greeted him.

"Go it, Plug," cried Curtis, below, who had been watching the sailors and Tom with the eyes of a connoisseur in gymnastics. "You can beat them, and give them the start, you can. Up higher, old fellow."

Tom looked down and saw the two sailors, one on each side of the mast, coming up at a run. He looked upward. There were no more *rattlines* now, no cross-pieces to rest the feet on. Four stiff black ropes led from the cross-trees to the head of the top-

gallant mast, and up these Tom saw that his way must lie. Without a moment's hesitation he seized one in each hand, and putting his knees and shins out against the ropes, commenced to scramble up, just like a cat. It was a trick he had often practiced in the gymnasium on two smooth poles; and the sticky, tarred rope, with its rough surface, made the task infinitely easier. For all that, it seemed to surprise the sailors, who shouted with laughter, bantering their two comrades in the chase after Tom.

Again Tom reached the end of his ropes, and saw nothing above him now but the smooth mast, which, as the vessel was in motion, seemed to sway to and fro with wonderful swings, considering the gentle roll on deck. Tom looked around him and then below. It was plain that he could go no higher, except by "swarming," and even then he was bound to be taken at last. Already Striker, the grim smile on his face expanding as he neared the boy, was coming up the topgallant rigging, shinning a single rope. Antonio had stopped at the cross-trees at the other side of the mast, as if to cut off his retreat in that direction.

"Plug" began to think of fighting, when he heard Manuel Garcia's voice on deck, shouting:

"Hey, Plug, come down on the main-topgallant stay; quick, or they'll get you! There it is, in front."

Plug looked where Manuel pointed, and found a stiff black rope, that led from where he was, in a slant downward and forward, to the head of the foretopmast. With a cry of defiance the lad grasped it and swung out from the mast, clasping the rope with arms and legs at once, and gliding rapidly down toward the foretopmast.

But while he thus eluded Striker, who was left behind in the middle of the main-topgallant rigging, he could not shake off Antonio. Before the cheers of the quarter-deck and the jeers of the sailors had died away, Antonio was seen to swing himself out on the *topmast stay*, a similar rope, parallel to and below the topgallant stay, and was fairly on his way to the foretop before Tom had reached the fore-cross-trees.

Now the cheers rose again for Antonio, and Tom, who was wonderfully quick at learning, went shinning up to the foretopgallant rigging like a monkey. He had a vague idea of going somewhere from thence, but he hardly knew where as yet. By the time he arrived at the foretopgallant mast-head, Antonio was at the cross-trees below him; and Striker, who had now reached the maintopgallant stay, was coming down it hand over hand, promising to be at the fore cross-trees as soon as Antonio. The blood of both sailors was up, to be beaten at climbing by a mere landsman, and a boy at that, like Tom.

At the foretopgallant mast-head Tom paused a moment. There was, it is true, a stay leading forward to the end of the jibboom; but it was occupied by the rings of the foretopgallant staysail, which was set, and looked too hazardous to slide down. But Tom saw that there were other stays yet, still higher up the mast. The jib-stay and flying jib-stay were both there, and the flying jib was not set. Up the smooth mast climbed "Plug," his progress being sensibly slower now, while his two pursuers, on the rougher ropes, doing their best, were slowly nearing him.

At last, when he reached the jib-stay, big Striker was just beginning to shin the mast, but Antonio had disappeared. "Plug" uttered a shout of triumph, and strained harder than ever upward. He was at the flying jib-stay at last, and looked down. The long reach and great strength of the English sailor had given him the advantage in the last pull up, hand over hand, and he was already within six feet of Tom.

"A miss is as good as a mile," shouted the boy, with a scornful laugh; and next minute he was shooting down the flying jib-stay, like a swallow on wing.

But Tom had reckoned without his host when he thought Antonio had given up the chase. That astute individual, foreseeing that Tom's course must end at last at the tip of the jibboom, as soon as he saw that "Plug" was swarming upward still, caught the foretopgallant *backstay*, and came down on deck like a flash, whence he ran out to the heel of the bowsprit, and there awaited our young friend's appearance. He heard Plug's shout of triumph, saw him come shooting down on the stay, and instantly jumped up and ran out on the jibboom to intercept him.

Like a flash, the gallant Western lad glided down the stiff rope, and reached the extreme end of the flying jibboom. Then he turned round to run in, laughing to think of how he had outwitted his pursuers, and saw himself confronted by the broad, sturdy figure, and dark, glittering eyes of Antonio.

"Aha, signorino, me got you now, *per bacco!*" cried the sailor, showing his teeth, half in glee half in anger. "You pay for dis chase you see!"

Tom cast a glance upward, as he stood leaning on the flying jib-stay, panting for breath. Big Striker was already coming down the stay, and in a moment more he would be a prisoner, if he stayed.

"Catch me, if you can, slow-coach," he shouted, as he flung his cap in Antonio's face. Then he leaped far out into the foaming brine, under the cut-water of the Bonita.

"Man overboard! Man overboard!" was the instant cry, as the men rushed to the side, throwing ropes.

Before Tom reached the stern he had caught hold of a rope, and was hauled on board, wet, but safe.

"Well, Cap," he observed coolly, to Gregson; "next time you send your men after a fellow, make sure that he hasn't been to gymnasium, will ye?"

And Tom was free to the Bonita's rigging for that voyage.

CHAPTER V.

THE DOLDRUMS.

A FEW weeks later, and the Bonita was in the *Doldrums*.

Do you know what the *Doldrums* are? Look into your last new geography, and you will find at the end of the book, several chapters on Physical Geography, as it is called—that is, the natural features of different parts of the world, without regard to the nations they belong to. There you will find all about the winds and currents, and among other things, the *Doldrums* or "Horse Latitudes."

You may understand better, perhaps, if you will listen to Don Luis Garcia and Captain Gregson, as they sit on the quarter-deck of the Bonita, under the great awning, talking to the boys, without any long words. "Kitty" Ledoux was listening attentively, when he heard a sailor singing an old ballad near him.

"Down in the *Doldrums* we lay

All the day, all the day,

Till the pitch boiled out of the seams, brave boys,

And the sailors they sweat in streams, brave boys,

And we whistled for wind that never came,

Till a hurricane rose in the lightning's flame,

And carried us out at last, brave boys,

From the heaving, rolling *Doldrums*."

And so Kitty asked:

"Please, Don Luis, do you know what the *Doldrums* are?"

"We are in them now," said Mr. Garcia, quietly.

Then Louis looked around him.

As far as they could see, the ocean was like a mirror, without so much as a ripple to disturb it. A few miles off was a dark line on the water, where the sea was covered with a mass of seaweed that stretched out of sight in all directions. But the Bonita lay in perfectly clear water. Her sails hung in folds from the yards, for there was not a breath of wind. The sky was of a dark, intense blue, without a speck of cloud, and the sun blazed down like a furnace. The sailors lay about on the fore-castle, under shadow of sails, wherever they could find them, and the passengers were under the quarter-deck awning, trying to keep cool, and all in their shirt-sleeves. Don Luis was smoking a cheroot, and most tranquil of the party, while poor Captain Gregson was fanning him, self, close to the thermometer, which marked 110° under the awning.

Louis sighed heavily.

"But what *are* the *Doldrums*?" he asked, again.

"The *Doldrums*" is a name given by sailors to a region of the Atlantic Ocean near the coast of Africa, and extending for several degrees on each side of the equator, where there are no prevailing winds, and where calms like this are found all the year round."

"Yes," said "Plug," suddenly breaking into the conversation, a thing he seldom did; "and Striker calls 'em *Horse Latitudes*."

Striker and Tom had become great friends since Tom's leap into the sea. The surly sailor seemed to have taken a fancy to the boy, on account of his pluck.

"*Horse Latitudes!*" said Jack Curtis, lazily. "Oh, get out, Plug; Striker was fooling you. What's the sea got to do with horses?"

"That's what I asked Striker," said Tom, "and he told me that once on a time a Spanish vessel, loaded with horses, got becalmed so long that finally they eat up all the food, and had to kill the horses. And ever since that, the sailors call these the *Horse Latitudes*."

"Is that true, captain?" asked "Kitty," wonderingly.

The captain turned languidly. He was a fat man and felt the heat terribly.

"It's as true as most sailors' stories," he replied. "It's true that they call these the *Horse Latitudes*, and it's quite likely that's the reason. The Spaniards used to go to the West Indies by the Southern Passage, and were very likely to get caught in the *Doldrums* by going too far south."

"But how did we get into them?" demanded Jack Curtis. "Ought we not to have kept clear of it?"

"We can't help ourselves," answered the captain. "The *Doldrums* must be crossed to get to the equator."

"But how are we to get out of them," persisted Jack, "if there's never any wind?"

The captain smiled.

"You're a smart lad, but you're not aware that we're moving out of them slowly all the while."

"Why, how can that be?" inquired Louis, innocently. "We don't move."

"No," said Captain Gregson, "but the sea does. We're in what's called the Guinea Current now, which carries us south at two or three miles an hour. Do you see yonder great mass of sea-weed? That's what the Spaniards call *Sargasso Sea*. It's made of the sea-weeds collected in the eddy of the great Atlantic Current, better known as the Gulf Stream. Inside *Sargasso Sea* is a dead calm. Round its edges goes the great Equatorial Current. It slants over, first through the Caribbean Sea into the Gulf of Mexico, rushes out past Florida, as the Gulf Stream, and then goes up along North America, and so over to England and Europe. Part of it turns round and comes back again to join the other half of the Equatorial Current, which follows the trade-winds over to South America. If it were not for that, we might stick here forever."

"But there are big storms here, Striker says," broke in "Plug."

"So there are," said the captain, uneasily; "and

what's more, I'm afraid we're going to have one very soon."

Don Luis started.

"What, is the barometer going down?" He spoke anxiously.

"A little," said the captain, "but not enough to frighten us yet. At least not when I last looked at it."

Don Luis arose.

"How high was it?" he asked.

"Twenty-eight and a quarter," said the captain. "Are you going to look at it?"

"Yes." And Don Luis went below with a grave face.

Presently he returned and spoke to the captain.

"Twenty-six and three-quarters," said the estanciero,* dryly.

This was all Greek to the wondering boys, but it had a great effect on the captain. He suddenly sprang up, all life, with a face of the keenest anxiety, and cast one look around him.

"Are you sure?" he demanded of Don Luis.

Then, without waiting for any answer, he dashed down-stairs into the cabin, from whence he presently ran out again, trumpet in hand, with a very pale face.

"All hands shorten sail!" shouted the captain, with a roar. "Rouse up, there, rouse up! All hands aloft! Clew up and furl. Make all snug! A tornado's coming, lads!"

In a moment the lately silent ship was full of bustle and noise. The four boys lay on the quarter-deck, vaguely wondering what was coming, when the sailors came tumbling out into the broiling sun, hauling away at the ropes, clewing up the sails, and running aloft like cats to furl them snug to the yards.

It seemed perfectly absurd to the boys, for there was still not a breath of wind stirring, not a cloud in the sky.

And yet they felt perfect confidence in the judgment of their elders. Don Luis stood by them, watching the process of furling, his face gradually clearing as sail after sail was packed snugly away.

"Kitty" at last ventured the question:

"What is the matter, Don Luis?"

"We're going to have a terrible storm, my boy," said the estanciero, kindly. "The barometer has gone down nearly three inches in as many hours."

Louis and Curtis both looked as if they wished to ask what he meant, but didn't dare to ask just then. Manuel Garcia was older than either of the rest, and had read a great deal. He now beckoned them away to the other side of the quarter-deck.

"Don't bother my father," he said, softly. "Remember, he's very anxious about the safety of the ship. I'll tell you what he means. When the mercury in the barometer falls suddenly two or three inches, it's a sure sign that a tornado is coming. The lower it falls the fiercer the hurricane. Look there."

As he spoke he pointed over the side toward the distant sea of weeds. Although there was not yet a breath of air, nor a cloud in the sky, a long, smooth roller was coming toward them with great speed, stirring up the glassy ocean in a strange, mysterious manner, as if some terrible monster were hidden there, disturbing the water. Presently, with a great heave, it lifted the Bonita in air, and set her masts swaying to and fro as if in a mighty tempest. Still, not a cloud, not a breeze. Then came another and another wave, each broader and heavier than the last, and there was the ship rolling, without any sail to steady her, as if she would break every spar. They could hear the masts creak and groan, while the stout shrouds were alternately stiff as iron bars, and loose and swaying.

"What is the reason of this?" asked Plug of Manuel.

"It's the waves of the distant tornado coming toward us," answered Garcia—"just like the rings in a pool when you throw a stone in. It won't be long before we catch it now. Thank Heaven, we're all snug, and Captain Gregson's a good sailor."

And indeed it became evident that something was coming. The mysterious swell grew heavier and heavier, and a little black speck began to rise and spread toward the west, in the form of a bank of clouds. A deep moaning sound was heard upon the waters, and yet there was not a breath of air.

But by this time every sail was furling. The sailors, running madly about, had sent down the top-gallant masts on deck, furling the canvas, and stood, panting and reeking with sweat, under the blazing sun, watching the dark cloud coming. They had done all that could be done, and the ship must wait for the storm.

"Now, boys, go below," ordered Don Luis, firmly, but kindly. "You're of no use here, and may get hurt on deck." Captain Gregson will want all his wits about him, so we must leave him alone."

Slowly and unwillingly the lads obeyed, and Don Luis followed them down to the cabin. Just as they reached it, the black cloud covered half the sky, and a cold breeze came whistling through the shrouds for a minute; then there was a sudden gust that caught the ship like the blow of a hammer, laying her on her beam-ends, and the tornado was on them.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PENGUIN-SLAYERS.

ABOUT a week later, the gray, ragged clouds that had been flying confusedly all day long over the rugged coasts of Patagonia, began to clear away in patches, on a cold, raw morning, when the Atlantic surf roared loudly on a desolate shingly beach, be-

low a line of iron-bound cliffs. The prospect was inexpressibly bare and desolate when day broke. The gray sea, furrowed with sharp waves crested with foam, the silent cliffs, only waking to noise as huge waves rushed roaring into a cavern, to be dashed back in showers of spray, the dark, angry heavens, only varying from dull gray to inkly black, all formed a picture as miserable as could be conceived.

But as the light strengthened, the storm broke. First one patch of blue sky appeared, then another. The wind, that lately bellowed in and out of the caverns, sunk into a breeze, strong and cold, it is true, but nothing compared to the fearful gale it replaced. Moreover, it had changed its direction from a north-east hurricane to a south-west wind, coming from the Antarctic ocean over the cold Patagonian desert.

In the first moments of this change, the whole face of the cliff, which had been hitherto bare and silent, suddenly became alive with animal life. Myriads of water-fowl, who had been hiding in their holes from the violence of the storm, rushed screaming forth, and soared on glad wings over the beach, where the waves still raged, searching for any food that might be thrown upon the shore after the storm.

Of this there was no lack. The beach was covered with shell-fish, torn from their moorings by the violence of the waves, dead birds, caught in the storm and drowned, pieces of wreck, and some bodies of human beings.

As the day advanced, the shore became alive with a multitude of other birds, so singular in shape that you would have laughed to see them. These birds had no wings. Instead thereof, each had two little flappers without any feathers, covered with a scaly black skin like that of an old turkey's drum-stick. The wings reminded you of how a chicken might look if you plucked all its feathers and let it run naked.

These birds were much like ducks otherwise, but their legs were so short, and set so far behind, that they walked upright like human beings. Each was as large as the largest goose, many much larger.

These curious creatures covered the beach, waddling about on land in the most helpless, undignified manner. Many of them could be seen, a little further inland, on a low marshy place, sitting up on little heaps of mud, which were, in reality, their nests, all gabbling and squawking together.

Had a person been on the top of the cliff, he might have seen many a pretty and interesting sight. But no one was there. Save for the birds, not a soul was to be seen.

Still, for all that, human creatures were coming, if not from the land, from the sea. Just as the storm broke, a large ship, with her mainmast gone by the board, and only the lower part of the other two masts remaining, was to be seen steering shoreward under foresail and spanker, making for the inhospitable coast of Patagonia.

In that battered and disabled ship, buffeted and tossed about by the angry waves, you would hardly have recognized the trim and beautiful Bonita, that sailed so gallantly forth from New York only a few weeks before, a pyramid of snowy canvas from deck to truck.

But the Bonita it was, nevertheless, sadly strained and knocked about, but still whole and sound in her hull. The gallant vessel, when first caught by the tornado, had been thrown on her beam-ends, that is to say, quite on her side, with the ends of her yards in the sea. This arose from the nature of the storm.

A tornado is nothing but a gigantic whirlwind, which comes on at first from a calm, and often seizes vessels sidewise, as the Bonita was seized. Before they could get her turned round, they were obliged to cut away the mainmast, when the ship slowly rose upright.

Once before the storm, however, there was not so much danger. Driven by the fierce hurricane, the good ship darted across the Atlantic toward Cape Horn at tremendous speed, the storm changing as it went from a whirling tornado to a fierce gale from the north-east. Not till they sighted the coast of Patagonia did it leave them at last, and then all hands were wearied out with the long struggle. As the gale abated the boys and Don Luis came on deck, and our friends gazed with much interest upon the coast ahead of them.

Barren and desolate as it was, it had a charm to them.

You can never know what that charm is, till you have been many long weeks at sea, with no prospect but the wide ocean, and see, for the first time, land ahead. Whatever it is, it is welcome as a change.

"Well, boys," said Captain Gregson, cheerfully, as he directed his glass toward the still distant land, "do you want to go ashore?"

"Oh, please, yes, sir," cried "Kitty," joyfully. "Is that Buenos Ayres?"

The captain laughed.

"Not quite, my lad. This storm has driven us way out of our track. That's the coast of Patagonia, somewhere about St. George's Bay, I guess."

"Ain't you sure?" asked Tom Bullard, surprised.

"No, my lad, not quite. You see, I haven't had a squint at the sun ever so long, and I can only tell by the dead reckoning."

"Please, sir," put in Louis, "what's a dead reckoning?"

"It's a way we have of finding our way in the dark," replied Captain Gregson. "Ask Don Luis. He'll tell you, for I must be conning the ship. We're going to anchor."

Indeed, they were coming closer and closer under the stiff breeze, for the Bonita, crippled as she was, was still very swift. They could already see the

moving white and black dots on the beach, which told of the myriads of strange birds.

As they approached, Don Luis explained the outlines of the captain's speech to Louis.

"I can't attempt to tell you the whole thing, my boy," he said; "but you can understand something. You know what latitude and longitude are. Well, the sailor finds these only by means of the sun or stars. If he can't see them he doesn't know where he is, for certain. Still, he can help himself by keeping a dead reckoning. For this he must throw the log very frequently to find exactly how many miles an hour he is going. Then he notes down the time and the exact course taken in his log-book, and so keeps on. Then, you see, to find where he is, he just marks all this down on the map, with all the turns and distances, according to scale, and finds how far he is from the place where he took his last observation of the sun."

"Well, I should say that's easy enough," remarked Jack Curtis, who had studied geometry at school. "What's the use of taking any observations at all?"

Don Luis laughed.

"You'd soon be in a bad fix if you didn't. A dead reckoning, you see, depends on a number of observations, and a mistake in one of them puts all the others out. The difference of half an inch on a common chart, might mean a hundred miles in reality. For instance, our dead reckoning has been very carefully kept, but the captain does not dare to trust to it, before he finds out exactly where he is. If it clears up to-day, he'll take an observation. If not, he's going to land, and find out from the natives where we are."

As he spoke, the Bonita, which had been standing toward the cliffs, *close hauled*, that is, slanting up against the wind, began to enter smoother waters, under the lee of the lofty cliffs.

"Plug" uttered a shout of joy as the large quarter-boat was loosened from the davits, and Captain Gregson said:

"Now, boys, who wants to go ashore?"

"Take me!" "And me!" "And me too!"

All were anxious to go.

Then the anchor of the Bonita fell with a sudden plunge into the green waters; and the good ship rested from her labors under the lee of the cliffs. The boat was lowered and filled with rowers, the captain, Don Luis, and the four boys, all sat in the stern, and they moved rapidly toward the beach.

"Oh, look! look!" cried Louis, as he noticed the strange wingless birds on the beach. "What are they, Pickle? I never saw such creatures."

"Penguins," said Jack, who had read some natural history. "Don't you know them? Why, there are pictures of them in every geography."

"Oh, now I remember," said Louis; "but I never thought I should see them alive."

The boat came safely to shore. There were no rocks, and the beach sloped rapidly down, composed of nothing but coarse shingle. The bow ran high up on the beach, and the men unshipped their oars and jumped out, dragging it still higher, so that the passengers could go dry shod on land.

Once ashore, there were the penguins all round them, gazing stupidly at them and never offering to stir. Captain Gregson, with Don Luis and two sailors, walked through the midst of them without seeming to alarm them in the least. If one or two waddled to one side, it was only to avoid being actually walked over, for they remained staring at the intruders as stupidly as ever.

"It's plain there are no natives here," said Don Luis to the captain, as they walked toward the cliff, "or the birds would not be so tame."

Then they set out to climb the cliff, to survey the country above.

Meanwhile the boys on the beach were much entertained in watching the singular motions of the penguins. There was an attitude of gravely dignity about them, as they waddled about or sat gravely looking on, watching the intruders, that was inexpressibly ludicrous.

"Who knows anything about the critters?" asked "Plug," as he looked round at the sailors, lounging by the boat. "Are they good to eat?"

"If a cove's starvin' 's might hear one," said English Striker, with his grim smile, "but they're as tough as leather and as fishy as—anything."

"St. *supremo*," said Antonio, showing his white teeth; "I leey on zem once for t'ree week, ven I ron away from my sheep, and, *cospetto*, I nevaer want to do eet again."

"The hegs ain't so bad b'iled 'ard," said Striker. "Wot's the bodds, boys and gents? Let's go arter 'em and 'ave a few. There's lots of 'em hover yonder."

As he spoke he pointed to the low, marshy plain at the end of the bay, where the cliffs receded, leaving somewhere about a square mile of ground, covered with nests and sitting birds. In the midst of this plain was a deep channel, up which the tide flowed.

The boys, ripe for fun of any kind, agreed readily to Striker's plan, and all proceeded toward the nesting-place of the penguins, resolved on having eggs for supper.

As they went, they were more struck than ever with the cool and unconcerned demeanor of the penguins. Very few even deigned to waddle out of the way. One old fellow, when Louis happened to straggle from the party and met him alone, actually refused to move. He seemed to know well enough that "Kitty" was only a little boy, for he stood looking at him and clacking his big beak together with a loud noise. Louis was by no means a brave boy, and the penguin stood nearly as high as he did himself. He dodged aside from the obstreperous bird and ran on to his party.

No one noticed his little adventure, or they would

* Estanciero—the proprietor of an *estancia*, or huge ranch.

have laughed at him, for the sailors and Manuel marched right through the midst, knocking the stupid creatures aside as they crowded in the way. Very soon they arrived among the nests and commenced a search for eggs. The sitting penguins never stirred as they approached, and Manuel told the men not to disturb them.

"They have probably been sitting some time, and the eggs are no good," he said. "Go to those nests that have only one or two eggs. They will be fresh, and you need not disturb the old birds."

But the warning was of no avail.

Sailors and boys are apt to be cruel, and fresh eggs proved to be scarce. At all events, Antonio, the Italian, was the first to pull a hen penguin off her nest. The poor creature clacked her bill together with a great noise, and struggled hard to keep her place, but the sailor, with careless brutality, jerked her off, and took away the eggs.

The ice once broken, the riot became general. The penguins raised a tremendous clacking as the sailors pulled them off, but the hens at least seemed to be unable to do anything else. They stood clacking and squawking, without offering any resistance.

The sailors and boys had filled their hats with eggs, and were thinking of returning to the boat, when they heard a loud noise behind them, and looking round, spied the old male penguins in a dense body coming waddling down to do battle.

At first they laughed, but they soon found cause to laugh on the other side of their mouths.

Stupid as the old penguins looked, their immense numbers seemed to make them bold, for they actually attacked the intruders with their long, sharp bills, giving them vicious digs, and fairly driving them into full flight for their boats, for they were all unarmed. Of course, they could easily outrun the clumsy birds, but the latter were in such immense numbers that the robbers received many a sharp dig before they got to the beach.

There, however, they turned the tables, picking up pieces of shingle and stoning their clumsy antagonists, who had halted, keeping up a very ferocious clacking all the time.

But the sailors at least were determined on revenge. Big Jack Striker ran to the boat, and picking up one of the stretchers, rushed back to the assault. "Plug," who had received numerous severe digs and felt very angry, soon followed his example, and even Manuel could not help joining the rest, so keen was the pain of his wounds.

In a few minutes later the penguins were waddling heavily away to the water, squawking loudly, pursued by the vengeful sailors, who knocked them over with the boat-stretchers by the dozen.

It was hard times for the poor, harmless penguins; but, luckily for them, the water was not far off. To its very edge they were chased, the females at last deserting their nests, and then a surprising change came over the birds. The same creatures that were lately so awkward and helpless on land became the perfection of grace and ease in the water. In a twinkling every one had dived into the deep green water and you could see them darting away like a shoal of fish. The oval, awkward body on land, proved to be the very shape of all others for stemming and cutting through the waves. The broad, splay feet, set so far back as to be almost useless on land, proved the best of all oars in the water. The useless wings became splendid fins. Secure in their native element, the penguins could afford to defy their pursuers, and the latter were forced to retire, having smashed the stolen eggs in the first fight, and gained nothing but a few pecks and digs, in the most inglorious manner.

"Well, lads," said Captain Gregson, laughing. "I guess you've had enough of penguins for one bout. Serve you right; so come along."

The captain and Don Luis had witnessed the scene from the top of the cliffs, whence they were now returning. They themselves had been comparing landmarks, and found that they were probably in the very bay shown them by the dead-reckoning—St. George's Bay.

This point was settled by noon by the first observation taken for eleven days, and they stood out from shore that night to the brisk, cold south-wester, which brought them in safety to Buenos Ayres three days later.

"Home at last, fellows," said Manuel, gayly, as the ship was moored to the long wharf. "We've had a hard voyage, but we're safe at last; and now, all ashore for the estancia!"

CHAPTER VII. QUEER PEOPLE.

Don boys were surprised at every thing in Buenos Ayres. There were very few carriages, in the first place, and every one rode on horseback. Don Luis had a number of servants waiting for them, with horses saddled, and the men were dressed in the queerest manner. They had broad-brimmed, steeple-crowned, straw hats, with red and yellow handkerchiefs falling down underneath, over their necks, like an old woman's cap. Then they had velvet jackets, and great shawls swathed around their loins, just like a baby's diaper. Their trousers made Louis and Tom laugh more than any thing else, for they were a yard wide, and had a long fringe that quite hid their feet, when they walked. And such spurs as they wore! The small pair was as long as the foot it was tied to, with rowels as large as a small saucer.

"Gracious, Pickle!" whispered Bullard, "did you ever see such guys in all your born days?"

"Never," assented Curtis; "I wonder who they are!"

Don Luis smiled. He was standing close to them, as the vessel came up to the dock.

"Those are my *peons* or servants," he said. "The

officers signaled our coming from the lighthouse and you see they're waiting for us. Now, boys, which of you can ride?"

"I can!" said Tom Bullard, energetically. "You just try me, Don Luis."

"Remember that our horses are quite wild," said the Don, kindly. "I don't want you to get hurt. I've sent for the *galera* to take those who can't ride, and you'd better go in it, with my little namesake, Louis Ledoux. Manuel is used to these horses."

"I've ridden wild mustangs before this," said Tom, sturdily. "No horse is going to throw me."

"Very well; then you can ride," said Don Luis.

"Master Jack, did you ever ride?"

Jack Curtis looked out on the pier. One of the horses, held by a *peon*, was just then dancing about on its hind legs, and looking particularly vicious, while all the rest were kicking and squealing like mad things. Jack was prudent.

"I've ridden once or twice, sir," he admitted; "but only on a very quiet horse, and I wouldn't like to undertake one of yours, just yet."

"Quite right, my boy," said Don Luis. "Never pretend to know more than you do, for it might cost you a fall. Our horses require good riders, I can tell you. You and Louis shall go in the *galera*, with the baggage."

"What's a *galera*, sir?" inquired Louis Ledoux.

"It's our name for a carriage," said Don Luis.

"Don't you see it, on the pier, there?"

Louis looked, and beheld a queer, rickety-looking old coach, hung on long leather straps, instead of springs, standing on the pier, by itself.

While they were talking, the *peons* left the horses, and came clustering around the gangway of the ship, while the sailors handed them the various trunks of the travelers. Such a clattering of spurs as there was, while the *peons* carried off the trunks, and strapped them on all over the back and roof of the *galera*.

"But, please, sir, where are the horses?" inquired Louis, innocently enough. He saw that the *galera* stood on the pier, but there was no sign of a harnessed horse, anywhere near it. All the animals were saddled and bridled, and all had riders lounging near them, except those kept for the travelers' use.

"Oh, you'll see the horses, presently," said Manuel, laughing. "You're not used to our ways yet, Kitty."

Louis was mystified, but he said no more. Bullard and Curtis were equally mystified, but they did not show their ignorance by asking questions, and the thing was soon explained.

Don Luis gave the signal to depart, after instructing the captain what to do with the cargo, and the boys, for the first time, set foot on the shores of South America.

Instantly the *peons* crowded around Don Luis and Manuel, kissing their hands, and welcoming them in Spanish, with a great number of compliments; for you must know, boys, that the Spaniards are the politest people on the continent. In fact, our boys might take a lesson from them, with advantage.

Don Luis pointed out his three young friends to his servants, who immediately bowed low to them, and kissed their hands, saying plenty of pretty things in Spanish, which, of course, our boys did not understand much of, yet.

But Bullard, who was born on the borders of Texas, and had heard the Mexicans speak, was much better off. He both understood and answered the polite fellows, who were wonderfully pleased at him.

Then Don Luis put Curtis and Ledoux into the *galera*, locked the door, and told them to "hold fast, for his men always went at a gallop." The boys were more mystified than ever. There were no horses to the *galera* yet, and no signs of a harness, and Don Luis was mounting his animal, as if he was going to leave them. They looked out of the windows and saw the *peons* leap on their horses. Then Tom Bullard was helped into the saddle, with some difficulty, for his horse was frightened at the boy's strange dress. But once up, Tom stuck there with a grace and ease that showed he had not unduly boasted of his riding. Then Manuel Garcia got on his horse, and still no sign of harness.

There were seven *peons* on horseback, and three travelers, and then at last the mystery was explained.

Louis noticed that the saddles were very small—nothing, in fact, but little squares of hide, while under them were five or six pieces of carpet, one over the other. A great leathern girth was strapped around every thing, saddle and all, and in the midst of the girth was a great iron ring, that seemed to be used instead of a buckle.

The boys noticed, for the first time about these girthings, that each had a rope of plaited leather thongs fastened to it, and hanging in coils from the saddle-bow. Now they saw the horsemen take out these ropes, which had nooses at the ends. You know what they were, of course. They were lassoes.

Lassoes they were, sure enough, and next minute they saw the use of them. The *peons* rode up, one by one, and dropped the nooses of their lassoes over the pole of the *galera*.

"Hold fast, boys!" cried Don Luis; and the next moment away went the old *galera*, bumping and jolting, the horsemen in front dragging it at the end of the lassoes, as if it had been a toy, and at full speed all the way from the start.

Away they went over the stones, hardly able to see for the jolting, and holding on tight to the straps by the side of the windows. They caught a glimpse of broad, dusty streets, a big church, and some soldiers at drill, beggars in the mud, dogs barking fiercely at the *galera*, and gay cavaliers, in red and

blue striped cloaks, called *ponchos*, galloping past them, all at full speed. Then—it seemed as if the town must be very small—they were out on a green plain, that stretched as far as ever they could see, and as flat as a billiard-table.

The horsemen went with unabated speed, but the *galera* did not rock so much, for the ground was smooth. Louis began to enjoy the headlong drive, for rapid motion is always nice. You know how you like to go down a good long hill, on a sled, when you're coasting; and riding beats coasting all hollow.

Now they looked out of the window, and there was Tom Bullard riding close to them, on a beautiful pony. They could see that all the horses were small, only a little bigger than ponies, and they all looked alike.

They had little pointed heads, with broad foreheads and large eyes, short, sturdy bodies and slim legs. But what looked funny was, that all their manes were cut short and bristling just like a mule's, while their tails were left long and flowing. Then the saddles and bridles amused them, with the stirrups—little triangles of steel, just big enough to admit the tip of the toe, and no more—while the bits of the bridles were huge curbs, with branches half a foot long, and a great iron ring going round the horse's under jaw, instead of a curb chain.

"Hey, fellows! isn't this fun?" cried Tom, shouting to be heard over the noise of the wheels. "Isn't this better than old Wolcott's? You bet!"

And away went Tommy at full speed, with a whoop and a yell. The *galera* rolled steadily on mile after mile. At last Louis said:

"Don't I wish I could ride like Plug? Say, Pickle, when 'll we ever get to the estancia? I'm nearly shaken to death."

"Guess we're near there now," said Curtis. "Here comes Manuel to tell us. I'm sure I hope so, for I'm bruised all over."

And indeed Manuel came up, no longer the quiet, studious Manuel, who had earned the name of "Father Wiseman," but all glowing with excitement from the rapid ride.

"Hurra, boys! we're almost there!" he cried, as he passed. "You can see the old *cmbu* tree in front of the house, if you look out."

Curtis craned his neck out of one window, and Louis out of the other. Far ahead, through the cloud of dust, beyond the galloping horsemen, they could see a single huge tree all alone in the vast plain, and close to it a long, low house, covered with brown thatch. A little distance beyond was a large white building, around which was congregated a herd of cattle, and other herds, as far as the eye could see, were feeding all over the plains.

"What's that?" yelled Jack, over the noise of the wheels, pointing to the white building.

"That's the *saladero*," screamed back Manuel. "Tell you all about it when we're home. Too much noise now."

And in a few minutes more the *galera* drew up, the *peons* unhitched their lassoes, and went off, always at a gallop, and Don Luis, dismounting, helped out his young guests, and welcomed them to his estancia, while a crowd of servants came running out to take the trunks, and show the young *señoritos* to their rooms.

Señorito is the Spanish term for young gentleman, and our friends soon became accustomed to hear it.

They were all tired with their rapid ride, and the two in the *galera* had had the bones nearly shaken out of them, but every thing was too new to them to permit them to go to sleep, as Don Luis recommended them before dinner. In South America every one takes two hours' sleep in the middle of the day, which they call a *siesta*, and the moment Don Luis got home he resumed the habits of the country, which he neglected in New York and at sea. But Manuel had not got into the habit yet, so he was willing to go round with his friends and show them everything that was to be seen, while his father slept.

"But you must all go on horseback," he said; "it's not safe to venture among our wild cattle on foot. I'll give you a quiet horse, Curtis, and we'll tie Kitty in the saddle, so he can't fall off."

Which was no sooner said than done. Four fresh horses were brought out in a moment from the nearest herd, thrown down with a lasso and blindfolded. Then the saddles were strapped on, and the horses allowed to rise, still blindfolded. Each horse had two men at his head to keep him still while they were mounting, and Louis Ledoux was firmly secured in his saddle. A belt was put round his waist, from which two straps were brought down to the saddle, before and behind, and "Kitty" was safe.

Jack Curtis had the quietest horse given to him, and then the *peons* removed the blinds from the eyes of the animals. Such a rearing and kicking ensued as never was seen.

CHAPTER VIII. THE BULL.

"CALL this a quiet horse!" cried Jack Curtis, as his animal reared and kicked and plunged, so as nearly to heave him off. Poor Jack had expected an animal that would go quietly along, and here was a beast that walked on its hind legs like a man, and then jumped up in the air and kicked.

"Let go the bridle, Pickle," shouted Bullard, riding up alongside.

For the fact was, that Jack, who had never ridden any thing but a hard-mouthed Northern pony, was hanging on to the severe bit, as if it had been a snaffle, which caused his horse to rear violently.

"Hang on to the mane!" pursued Bullard, suiting the action to the word, as his own horse stood upon its hind legs, excited by the other. But it was too late for poor Pickle.

At that very moment his horse made a desperate effort, pawed the air wildly, and came over backward.

"Jump off, Pickle," yelled Tom, and Curtis was just cool enough to obey the injunction, leaping off as the horse came over, and coming down safe on his feet, as the animal fell down.

"Now, get on before he rises!" cried Manuel Garcia, whose own horse was capering about, and who was busy keeping "Kitty" Ledoux's pony still.

Jack hesitated a moment, and the fallen horse began to scramble upon its forelegs, when Bullard screamed out:

"Get on, Jack! Don't be scared. He can't throw you."

And Jack found himself, in a moment more, on the horse's back, as the beast rose, and stood trembling.

"Now put your feet in the stirrups, and take up your reins gently," said Manuel. "You'll soon learn to ride our horses, Curtis. Be gentle now. Don't haul on the bridle, or you'll make him rear up. If he rears, let the bridle hang loose, and catch a lock of the mane. So. Now turn your toes in, hollow your back, and let your legs hang easy, as I do. That's a quiet horse, if you only take him the right way."

Curtis followed his friend's advice, and found the benefit of it. When he left the horse's head alone, it went quietly enough, after the first burst of impatience, but the bit in its mouth was so severe, that it required a very "light hand," that is to say, the reins must hang nearly loose.

However, they soon got over their first troubles, and rode out of the inclosure of the estancia, onto the "pampa." Of course you knew that the great green plains of Buenos Ayres are called "pampas," and it was in the midst of these, by a spring, under the great ombu tree, that the estancia was situated. The ombu is a great tree, something like an elm, which grows to an immense size on the pampas of Buenos Ayres, and always shows the existence of a spring near its roots.

Louis Ledoux, after his first fright at finding himself on a wild horse, enjoyed the ride wonderfully. He was fastened down so securely that the animal could not throw him, while his arms and legs were quite free. They all started at a gallop, for in South America no one ever trots. It's always either a walk or a gallop there, and the gallop is the most common. The pampas horses, too, have a peculiarly smooth, easy pace, that makes the gallop delightful, and Curtis, who had been afraid he should disgrace himself at first, found, now, after his difficulties in starting were over, that it was quite easy to ride these plump, pretty little horses, for they run willingly enough.

So away the boys went at a keen gallop, shouting and laughing for glee. As they passed the great white building Manuel had called the *saladero*, two stout, dark-complexioned men, in the fluttering ponchos and broad-brimmed hats worn by every one there, ran to their horses, at a signal from Manuel, as he passed, and came galloping after the party of boys.

These were two of Don Luis Garcia's cattle-herders, and they, in common with the other inhabitants of the pampas, have the general name of *gauchos*. You must pronounce this as if it was spelt *gow-cho*, boys, and don't forget the name, for you'll hear it very often, in the course of the story.

The two gauchos were stout, handsome men, with bushy black side-whiskers and mustaches, and their clothes were covered with gold buttons and lace, for a gaucho spends all his money on clothes, and lives in a little hut, where there is not so much as a chair. Instead of this, they sit down on a horse's skull, and sleep on an ox-hide, and eat nothing but beef all the year round.

These gauchos came along behind, in case of accidents, for Manuel and the boys were riding out into the midst of the herds of savage cattle, and the boys might easily get into danger. Especially was Jack Curtis liable to this, for he was always running into scrapes, whence he had derived his name of "Pickle." Jack found his horse so easy paced, that he dashed on ahead, at full speed, laughing and shouting, and before long found himself in the midst of the herds.

There they were, all round, fierce, savage-looking bulls, with long sharp horns, stately oxen, with still longer ones, and hundreds of cows, guarding their calves. They were scattered all over the pampa, feeding or lying down, and as soon as the boys galloped in among them, they began to jump up and stare at them. In a very little time the riders were out of sight of the estancia, and surrounded by the cattle. At first the animals were quiet enough, and stood staring as the boys passed, after which they resumed their feeding. But presently one of the gauchos behind them shouted out:

"*Cuidado, señores! Cuidado! Mira los toros!*" "What do they mean, Plug?" asked Curtis, who was ahead with Bullard. "What are those fellows saying?"

"They're telling us to 'look out for the bulls,'" replied Bullard, coolly. "See that old fellow coming for us, Pickle? Cheese it!"

Jack just turned round to look where Bullard pointed, as the Western boy wheeled his horse, and galloped off. Bullard knew what a wild bull was, well enough. He had seen them out West.

There was an ugly-looking black bull, pawing the earth and bellowing, with his eyes fixed on Jack Curtis; and as Bullard turned and ran, Mr. Bull tossed up his tail, put down his head, and darted at poor "Pickle." Now Jack Curtis was a spunky boy, but he didn't like the looks of that bull, the more especially as several others caught the alarm

at the same moment, and came slowly toward him. It seemed as if they had a special spite for that one boy.

Jack had no need to turn his horse. The animal wheeled round by himself like a flash, before Jack knew where he was, and the sudden bolt unseated poor "Pickle," who was thrown off the horse's back, and fell right on the plain, in the path of the wild bull.

But "Pickle" was up in a minute. He wore a long sheath-knife in his belt, which Manuel had given him on the ship, and, with some idea of defense, he whipped it out, and awaited the bull. The beast came thundering on, as quickly as it could gallop, and was already within twenty yards, when help came, from other quarters.

Jack heard a shout, and beheld one of the gauchos in the rear of the bull, coming down full speed, swinging his lasso over his head, and shouting loudly.

Jack threw up his arms and shouted back, in the hope of scaring the bull, but it was all useless. On the terrible creature came, the foam flying from its lips, its little red eyes sparkling with rage.

Jack watched his opportunity, and made a desperate jump to one side, as the bull's sharp white horn passed him, so close as to tear his jacket and throw him down. But the next instant he was safe. As he tumbled over on his back, he saw the black noose of the gaucho's lasso fly through the air, and hang quivering over the bull's horns. Then he scrambled to his feet, knife in hand, to find the gaucho's horse pulled up, and hanging back with all its might, while the lasso was stretched as stiff as an iron bar, and the black bull was plucked off his feet, and sent sprawling on his back, in a moment.

"Hamstring him, Pickle!" cried Manuel's voice, as Jack stood hesitating. "Hamstring him, before he can get up."

Then Jack behaved like a trump. The bull was struggling to get up, within ten feet of him, and the boy rushed at the savage beast. You know that a horse always gets up first on its fore legs, boys, if you've ever been in the country. But an ox or bull always gets up on its hind legs first. This was just what Jack's bull was doing, bellowing savagely, and therefore its hind legs were fully exposed to the boy's knife. Jack had had the way to hamstring explained to him by Manuel, many a time, and he put his teachings into practice now. He gave a single cut on the bull's hind leg, just above the hock or joint, and down fell Mr. Bull, in a moment, with the back sinew divided, perfectly helpless. Then a gaucho brought up Jack's horse, and they rode back to the estancia.

CHAPTER IX. THE SALADERO.

The boys returned from the bull adventure safely, and after dinner visited the *saladero*. The *saladero* was a low white building, with a great yard in front, inclosed with rails, called a *corral*. The same name is given to a stock-yard, by our Western men. Within this yard were a number of cattle, or rather their carcasses, lying about, half skinned. As the party entered, in rode a mounted gaucho, dragging at the end of his lasso a furious ox, which was chasing the horseman, who had all he could do to keep the rope stretched. But as they looked on, a man on foot started out, with a long knife, with which he dextrously hamstrung the animal, in the midst of the corral, and down dropped the raging ox, helpless.

"Now, boys, we'll go through the slaughter-house quick," said Don Luis, "for it's not a pleasant sight; but I want to show you the way they make salt beef, afterward."

So the party proceeded to a long shed, and saw several men at work there. One of them cast a noose over the horns of an ox, and two others began to turn a wheel, round which the rope was lapped. The ox was drawn, struggling in vain, up to the wheel, and then the butcher who stood there stabbed it in the back of the neck, just behind the horns, with a short dagger. Instantly the ox dropped dead.

"There, boys," said Don Luis, "that's the quickest and most merciful way to kill an animal ever found. The creature never knows what struck him. Now come on."

They passed on, by the place where men were skinning the bodies of the dead oxen, and spreading out the hides to dry in the sun. Then they saw carts passing, full of huge joints of meat, going into the open doors of the *saladero*, where they could see a number of furnaces at work. Don Luis told them that *saladero* means "salting-house." They went in, and saw, in a few minutes, what became of the meat. At one side was a row of little brick furnaces, with huge iron caldrons or pots above them. There were a quantity of men at work, at a great heap of joints of raw meat, with knives. One set was cutting off all the fat and suet, and carrying them off to the caldrons. Another set cut right into the joints themselves, and pulled out the bones, after which they cut all round them. The meat was taken to other caldrons, and thrown on, along with big bags of salt; and then the bones that lay in heaps, with all the refuse of the carcasses, were put into the fires. That was all the fuel there was. Don Luis told them that a bull's bones made just enough fire to melt all his tallow, and cook his meat. The pampas have no wood on them, or nearly none, so that the bones and dried cattle-dung are all they have to make fire with. And splendid fires these bones made, over which they tried out the tallow, and poured it into great molds.

Louis Ledoux took a little of the salt beef to taste, but he declared it was "only fit for a nigger," it was so salt.

"Well, the negroes like it," said Don Luis, laughing. "I agree with you, however, that it's not worth much, but then it costs us nothing. All we kill our animals for is the hides and tallow. The meat in most *saladeros* is burned up to make fires, after every atom of tallow has come out of it, but I see mine, and find it pays better."

The boys were much interested in looking round the *saladero*, and liked it much better than the slaughter-house. But a sudden stop was put to all their amusements by an unexpected occurrence.

A great shouting and noise arose outside, and a man rushed in at the door, screaming out:

"Don Luis! Don Luis! *Los Indios! Los Indios!*"

Don Luis started violently.

"Indians!" he said. "Impossible! It cannot be! They never will dare to come in so close to the city."

But he rushed out nevertheless, and beheld the yard in wild commotion. The peons and gauchos were running toward the *saladero* from all round, and those in the corral were hastening toward the shed. The boys ran out with their host, and beheld the cause of all the alarm, in the shape of a mob of mounted Indians, with long lances, who were charging past the gate of the corral toward the herds, yelling at the top of their voices. They passed so close to the *saladero*, that the boys could see them plainly, tall, lithe, sinewy fellows, of a dark bronze color, bareheaded, with mops of black hair, and perfectly naked. They were armed with very long lances of cane, which they tauntingly shook at the people in the *saladero*; and then they were into the midst of the herds of cattle driving them off under the very noses of the amazed gauchos.

They passed like a flash, and were gone, as Don Luis cried out:

"Who will follow me to punish these fellows?" "Count me in, boss," was the first answer. It came from old "Plug."

CHAPTER X. LANCE AND LASSO.

DON LUIS stared at Bullard as if he had hardly understood him, but the lad was evidently in earnest. Then all the men of the estancia began to clamor to go too, and it was evident that no time was to be lost, for the Indians were rapidly driving off the cattle.

These Indians, boys, come from a country to the north of Buenos Ayres, called the *Gran Chaco*, where they roam about on horseback, quite naked, winter and summer, living on mare's milk and flesh, and on such cattle as they can drive off from the estancias. They are very bold and fearless, and always attack at full gallop, and they are perhaps the finest riders in the world, for they will stand upright on a barebacked horse, going at speed. They have no houses, and only build little shelters of branches in very cold weather, trusting to their fires to keep them warm when they're asleep.

They only fight on horseback, and their weapons are a lance, a knife, and the *bolas*. What that is, you will see in the sequel.

A Chaco Indian on foot seems to be helpless. He cannot fight then. But put the same man on a wild horse, without any saddle, with a little string round the animal's under jaw, and the Chaco Indian is a perfect devil. The gauchos and soldiers alike dread him, for he fears nothing. It is not often that these Indians venture near the city of Buenos Ayres, but when they do, they do much mischief.

Don Luis ran to the house in a great hurry, followed by his peons, and they hastily seized their arms. In South America, every one carries more or less arms in the open country, and Don Luis, being an American, had revolvers and rifles.

Both Curtis and Bullard were well provided with pistols and guns, and the latter was a very good shot, from his early western life. Curtis did not know much about shooting, being a town boy, but he had a revolver and a Ballard rifle, given him by his father, besides a light sword, of which he was very fond, for "Pickle" had been to a fencing academy in New York, and knew all about it, as he thought. Bullard and Curtis were both stout boys of sixteen, and Manuel Garcia was a year older.

Louis Ledoux was to be left behind, as he was too young to be of much use, and indeed he was not very sorry, for the Indians had frightened him out of his wits.

Horses were soon procured out of the horse-corral by the house, which was always kept full. The people at the estancia found that the Indians had tried to break in there, but their posts were too strong for them, and they feared pursuit too much to tarry long. When Don Luis galloped out of the estancia gate, there were twenty people in the party, including the three lads, and all were more or less armed, from sabers to rifles and revolvers.

As they rode out of the gate, they saw a troop of horsemen coming from the city, at sight of whom Don Luis was much rejoiced. It turned out to be a small party of soldiers, sent out to scout after Indians, for the news of the raid had spread far and wide, already.

Curtis noticed that they were funny-looking soldiers, for their uniform was much like the ordinary country dress. But instead of hats they wore little red cloth caps, shaped exactly like the paper caps carpenters make themselves, with a peak before and behind. They wore brass cuirasses, and carried carbines and sabers, with the lasso, common to all, at the saddle-bow. But the funny-looking trousers, with the swathing-cloth round the middle, didn't look very military, and their spurs could be heard jingling long before they came up.

Such as they were, they were all stout, bold-looking fellows, and a very welcome addition to our little party, for the Indians were at least fifty in num-

ber. And so away they went, guided by the dust of the flying herds, on the track of the robbers.

Now the question was, could they catch them? The Indians had at least fifteen minutes' start, before they all got out after them. True. But you must remember that the Indians were trying to drive off the cattle. Now it takes some time to start a large herd of cattle. They don't run as fast as horses, and it's difficult to get them well started. Once going, they will take a good pace, but it is difficult to get them to leave their comrades.

And so these Indians found. Don Luis had an immense estancia, nearly twenty miles square, and his cattle averaged half a million. You need not stare, boys. I mean what I say. It's a very small estancia that has less than thirty thousand cattle; and Don Luis had the largest in the place.

And as it was near evening, and all the herds were close to the corral, they were so closely packed that the Indians found it very hard to start them all together. When Don Luis and his party had galloped full speed for about a mile, they discovered the immense mass of cattle ahead of them, swaying to and fro in great confusion. The Indians were plainly visible, on the outskirts, goading the animals with their long lances, to drive them on, while the poor creatures were bellowing with pain and terror. But as fast as they drove them on, some of the herd on the outskirts would break away, and try to run back, followed by a stream of cattle. Then some of the Indians would scour away to head them off, and so the main body of the herd progressed but slowly.

Don Luis remarked to his son:

"We shall have to fight for them, Manuel. If they were going to run, they would not try to drive the whole herd. Keep out of danger, my boy, and if any thing happens to me, you will find my will in the bureau in my room."

Manuel smiled.

"Wherever you go, I go, sir," he answered.

It was within an hour of sunset when they saw the Indians, and the soldiers began to yell at once. Jack Curtis felt a strange beating of his heart, when he heard that yell, and heard the Indians reply to it. It was his first fight in grim earnest, and he thought to himself, "Am I a coward?"

Some day, boys, when you grow up, if you are soldiers, you may feel that strange sinking of the heart before a battle. But never fear. It's a natural feeling, and you'll get over it. Every one feels afraid in his first battle, but the cowards run away, while the brave boys go on in spite of their fears. And that's what "Plug" and "Pickle" did.

It was a terrible sight to them; for just as soon as the Indians heard them yell, they answered, and turning round, came straight on, with couched lances, at full speed, howling like wolves. The soldiers fired a scattering volley, and then drew their swords, and galloped on to meet them.

Tom Bullard had his revolver out, and he never fired a shot till he was close to the Indians. Then, with a coolness admirable in so young a lad, he popped over the Indian chief, at less than ten feet distance, and wheeled off to avoid the thrust of the next man's lance.

In a moment more, Indians, gauchos, and soldiers were all fighting fiercely together, on horseback, amid shouts, and yells, and shots, and sword-cuts.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BATTLE.

THE Indians came down, in a solid mass, as hard as ever they could urge their horses. The gauchos and soldiers, on the other hand, were spread out into a thin line, loosely scattered. They were not more than two-thirds the number of the Indians but they were much better armed, and covered twice as much ground.

The Indians burst through the center of the slim line, where the soldiers were, and drove them back, but, at the same time, the gauchos closed in all round them, and compelled them to turn. Now you must know, boys, that a lance is a very good weapon when a man is going full speed, but in a free fight it's too cumbersome, and too much in the way.

So that when soldiers and gauchos closed in, and both parties were brought to a stand, the long cane lances of the Indians were almost useless, while the soldiers, protected by their brass cuirasses, dashed in and cut right and left. Some of the gauchos were provided with swords, but the most had only long knives. They were all strong men, and they tried to grasp the Indians and stab them.

Tom Bullard went galloping round the crowd, every now and then dashing in, and firing his revolver at some Indian, close to him, and then wheeling off again. Manuel Garcia stuck close to his father, in the midst of the Indians, and used his sword like a hero. Jack Curtis soon found more than he had bargained for. He ward off the thrust of an Indian lance, but before he could cut at the man with his sword, the brawny savage had hold of him with his hands, and was pulling him out of the saddle. Jack struggled in vain; the Indian was much the stronger, and soon had him on the front of his horse, carrying him away out of the fight.

For the savages were so numerous and brave that they gave the gauchos a hard fight. It was only the pistols that enabled the latter to win the battle, and in the use of these Bullard was much the best of the party. Every shot of his revolver struck down an Indian, and Don Luis, who was a very strong man, was cutting away with his sword in the midst of the fight.

At last the Indians broke and ran, carrying off Jack Curtis with them, and leaving several dead on the ground. The gauchos gave a yell, and galloped after them, with the soldiers ahead. In a few minutes more they were all stopped, by getting into the

midst of the great herd of cattle, which the Indians had been trying to steal. The animals were all wedged into a tight mass, swaying, crowding and bellowing.

Now the Indians found they had made a bad job of it, for they could not get away. A few of them turned to fight, more desperately than ever, but most of them scattered in different directions, and tried to escape. Some dashed into the middle of the cattle, where they were soon brought to a standstill. Others turned to skirt the herd, and a few galloped back past the pursuers, to get out between the estancia and the herd.

Among these were the Indians who were carrying off Jack Curtis a prisoner. Bullard saw them and yelled to Don Luis. Then the two, together with Manuel Garcia and a single gaucho, started in the pursuit. But Bullard's revolver was empty by this time. He tried to reload it as he galloped on, but had only got a single cartridge in when two of the Indians turned and charged him. There were eight in the party altogether, and they seemed determined to defend their prisoner, when they saw how few were coming after them. The rest of the gauchos and soldiers were scattered all over, killing the fleeing Indians, and Bullard was some distance ahead of Don Luis and Manuel.

But old "Plug" was not fool enough to wait to be speared. He had no sword, and didn't know how to use one if he had had it. His dependence was on his shooting, and so he turned and galloped back to his friends, still putting in the charges of his revolver as he went. When the Indians saw that they turned back, with a yell of defiance, and "Plug" instantly answered it, and went after them again.

And now we must go back to poor "Pickle," who was in a pretty pickle indeed. He had lost his sword in the struggle with the Indian, and was lying, bent over the shoulders of a galloping horse, with a great, powerful savage holding him down like a vise. Poor Jack felt perfectly helpless, and for a minute thought that his last hour was come. But when he found that the Indian did not kill him at once his spirits rose, and he began to think of some way of escape. He remembered that he had a knife in his belt, but he did not dare to try and draw it, for he felt that the Indian was watching him.

Then the savages broke, and he felt himself being carried away; and looking back, he saw the two Indians drive off Bullard. But he could also see the forms of Don Luis and Manuel coming after, and his captor was looking anxiously back, and violently whipping his jaded horse.

Jack was lying on his back, bent over, and by turning his head, could see that his Indian was nearly alone now. The horse with the double burden was falling back in the race, and the two Indians who had turned to threaten Bullard were going off by a different way. It flashed into his mind that now was his time, and his hand instinctively felt for his knife.

Horror! It was gone! It had dropped out of the sheath, and he was unarmed!

At that moment his captor turned his head and looked at him fiercely. The Indian wore a long knife, secured by a strap under his arm, and this he suddenly raised up, and prepared to use.

It was evident that he was going to kill his prisoner, despairing of carrying him off, for Don Luis was coming up as fast as he could, and would soon be within shot.

Jack was determined not to die without a struggle. The Indian had only one hand on the boy's breast, and that one held his captor's lance too.

Jack made a tremendous effort, with all his strength, and at last succeeded in writhing up and catching the Indian round the neck, preventing him from using the knife while they struggled.

The savage might have killed him if he would have dropped his lance, but this a Chaco Indian never does. So Jack writhed up, and got his knee in the pit of the other's stomach, and then, with a great wrench, the two toppled off the horse, and fell on the pampa, Jack undermost. In the struggle the Indian had dropped the knife, and the horse ran away.

Now the infuriated savage tried his best to choke Jack, but "Pickle" had got his hands in the Indian's long hair, and he clung to him like a vise, trying his best to butt with his head. How the fight would have terminated, is not hard to say. The Indian was twice as strong as Jack, and must have finished him, when a shot was heard. The savage threw up his arms with a wild yell, and Pickle staggered up to his feet, to see Bullard close up to him, with the smoke coming from the mouth of his pistol.

"Good for you, Pickle!" cried the voice of his comrade. "You fit like a ring-tailed squealer, you did. I'll bet on you, old hoss."

Jack was pretty well exhausted, but very grateful, for his enemy was dead. He looked up, and there was Don Luis, with Manuel a little way off. They had overtaken the two Indians who had driven off Bullard, and the wild horsemen turned to bay as he looked. Bullard yelled with glee.

"Good for you, Wiseman!" he cried. "Give 'em fits, old hoss! That's the style! Go it, old fellow!"

And then both boys uttered a cry of dismay. They saw the Indians come down full speed on father and son, shaking their lances. Manuel parried his adversary's blow, but his father was not so fortunate. The boys beheld the Indian's lance run clear through the unfortunate man, coming out behind for over a foot, and throwing him clear out of the saddle.

Bullard dug in his spurs and dashed off like a whirlwind, brandishing his pistol. As he came up, the other Indian broke loose from Manuel, who had wounded him, and drove his lance into the left flank

of the boy's horse. The poor animal sunk groaning to the earth, and Manuel drew his revolver as he leaped off.

But Bullard saved him the trouble, for he dashed past the Indian before the latter could reach him with his lance, and put a bullet through the savage's breast. Seeing Bullard coming down upon him, the other Indian threw himself down alongside of his horse, so that he was quite covered from bullets, and galloped off in that manner.

Bullard scoured after him, and pursued him for some distance.

Suddenly the Indian leaped upon his horse again, and began to swing a curious-looking weapon round his head. Two round stones were fastened at either end of a cord, and another cord was tied in the middle of the first, making three tails. The Indian then turned his horse, and galloped round Bullard, swinging the balls around and yelling. The boy tried to get near enough for a sure aim, and was just leveling his pistol when the Indian threw the queer-looking weapon at him.

Bullard had a brief glimpse of three balls, twisting over and over in the air, and then they seemed to tangle themselves around the legs of his horse in a moment, and down came the beast on his nose, throwing Bullard far out over its head.

He found out practically what an ugly weapon is the celebrated bolas, and now, boys, you know what it is, too.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ESTANCERO.

THE fight was over and the Indians had fled. But the victory had cost the others dear. Don Luis was desperately wounded, three of the gauchos and two soldiers killed, and several others hurt. Manuel, by wonderful good fortune, had escaped without a scratch.

The boy knelt all alone by his father's body, supporting his head on his knee, when the gauchos came galloping up in pursuit of the enemy. That pursuit stopped instantly, when they saw what had happened. Don Luis was beloved by all his peons, and the soldiers knew him well. The estancia was nearly gone when they crowded round him. The spear had penetrated the middle of his breast, and could not be extricated, for it had passed through to his back and was barbed. He was suffering intense agony.

Then came one of the soldiers, a rough old warrior, with a sergeant's stripes, and drew his knife.

"Carraambo, you are all fools," he said, as he looked at the peons wringing their hands, weeping and lamenting over their master. "The spear must come out, or the man will die. Stand aside. I've seen worse cases cured."

Every one gave way to him, for he seemed to know what he was about. He seized the slender cane shaft of the lance, and cut it off close to Don Luis's breast.

"Turn him over on his side," he said.

Then he pulled the head of the lance, and with one great wrench pulled it out of Don Luis's back. The estanciaero gave a fearful shriek of agony, and fell back senseless. It seemed as if he must be dead, from the way the blood poured out.

But it was not so. He had only fainted from the intense pain. If you want to have some idea of what that was, boys, take a good long needle and run it into your breast as far as you can drive it; then keep turning it backward and forward, and you'll have some very faint notion of what Don Luis suffered when the soldier drew out the lance from his lungs. The blood welled out of his breast in a red tide, and every now and then oozed from his mouth.

It seemed as if he had not long to live. The wild-looking gauchos were weeping and lamenting, and vowing vengeance on the Indians; the very soldiers could not restrain their sorrow. Poor Manuel was the quietest among them, and yet he was losing the most, for he had had no mother for many years, and would soon be an orphan.

Then, as he knelt by his father, the estanciaero opened his eyes and whispered:

"Manuel, are they gone?"

"Yes, padre mio, they are driven off," said the boy, mournfully; "but at what a cost! You are hurt, dying."

Don Luis smiled faintly.

"I shall get over it, boy. Your friends, where are they?"

Manuel started and looked round. For the first time he remembered his comrades.

"Where are the senoritos?" he asked, of the nearest peon.

A chill of apprehension seemed to fall on every one. "No se, senor," (I do not know, sir) stammered the gaucho.

Then there was a bustle of whispered conversation, and a voice said: "Los Indios! They are prisoners!"

Don Luis heard the words and looked troubled.

"They were in my charge," he muttered. "I should not have let them come; and now I cannot go after them."

There was a dead silence, and then Manuel showed the stuff he was made of. It was evident that something must be done, first to save his father, then to rescue his friends. That the latter were gone, there was now no doubt.

First the lad set to work to cheer his father.

*To those who think such a wound as described necessarily fatal, the author would say that in his personal experience he has known of three such cases, one from a small sword, two from conical bullets, all of which were cured.

"Don't fret over it, father," he said. "We'll get them back as soon as you get well. That's the first thing to do, you know. Come, men, make a litter quick. Those Indian lances will do. There are plenty of ponchos. My father must be taken home first. Juan Gonzalez, take three horses for a change and ride at speed to Rosario for the English doctor. Quick, as you value your master's life."

The man he addressed made no reply in words. He ran to his horse, sprung on its back, whirled his lasso round his head, and in a twinkling had captured a loose horse. A second gaucho was equally prompt, and in less than five minutes Juan Gonzalez was galloping away, leading two horses, in the direction of Rosario, an important trading station about twenty miles off.

Rosario enjoyed the distinction of having the only doctor in the Confederation, outside of Buenos Ayres. In fact the climate of the pampas is so healthy, that sickness is unknown, and doctors would starve in most places. The one in question, an Englishman, named Percival, had stopped at Rosario on his way to Chill, and had been induced to remain there for a few months. Being the only physician for hundreds of miles, he had acquired a respectable practice, most of his cases being wounds and bruises.

As soon as the peon had departed on his errand, the gauchos constructed a rude litter with great skill and quickness. Several Chaco Indians had been killed, and their lances lay on the ground, long, slender elastic canes. Six of these were taken and tied in two bundles, three in each bundle, after which ponchos were fastened between them.

On these ponchos the wounded estancero was laid, as tenderly as possible, when four of his men took him up and proceeded on their slow and sorrowful way home.

Poor Don Luis was suffering intensely, but he was much stronger than at first appeared. After all, a hole through the body is not so fatal as you might think. We have known many men shot through and through the breast get well of it, but never one who was wounded in the stomach.

It was some distance back to the estancia, but they reached it in about three hours, and found to their joy that the patient was asleep, lulled by the swing of the litter and his own weakness. They had hardly been there ten minutes before the gallop of horses was heard outside, and Juan galloped up with the doctor. He had ridden forty miles while they had been walking five; but the difference of pace was considerable.

The doctor examined Don Luis carefully and asked several questions. He praised Manuel very highly for what he had done in bringing the wounded man home with so much care that he was asleep, and told him that there was nothing to be done for him but to keep him quiet. Then he washed the wounds and announced that they had stopped bleeding. Don Luis was taken into an inner room where it was dark and cool, covered up, and fell asleep again.

Now it remained to tell Louis Ledoux what had happened, and Manuel shrunk from the task. Louis had always adored Bullard so much, since the latter's defense of him at school, that the boy was inconsolable when told of his loss.

"Oh, Wiseman, why didn't you let me go?" he said. "I might have been taken instead of Plug; and now we'll never see him again, nor Pickle either. What'll Mr. Curtis say? They're both killed." "Now listen to me, Kitty," said Manuel, kindly; "they can't be killed, or we should have found their bodies. The Indians never carry off their enemies' dead bodies. Tom and Jack have been taken prisoners, and they're in the middle of the Gran Chaco now. We must go and find them, as soon as father gets well."

"But how can we get them back?" asked Louis. "Ransom them, if necessary, with half our fortune. I know my father too well to think otherwise. Tom and Jack were entrusted to us, and we are responsible for them."

"Then you must let me go with you to find them," said Louis, stoutly. "I'll not be left behind when old Plug's in danger, I can tell you that, Wiseman."

"You shall not," said Manuel; and so the matter ended.

The two boys went in to help nurse Don Luis, and we'll leave them there, while we return to see what became of "Plug" and "Pickle."

CHAPTER XIII. THE CAPTIVES.

WHEN the entangled horse threw Bullard, the lad pitched on his head with such force that he lost his senses for a time. When he came to himself, he scrambled confusedly up, hardly knowing, for a few moments, where he was and what he was doing. Then his eyes fell upon Manuel, bending over Don Luis, and he turned hastily to find his horse.

There lay the beast, completely crippled with the bolts, and he heard the rapid gallop of other horses close by. Thinking it a rescue party of gauchos, he looked up; and the next instant half a dozen wild Indians swept by him in full flight, and two of them, leaning from their horses, as they passed like a whirlwind, caught him up and carried him away as if he had been a baby.

It was done so quickly, with so marvelous dexterity, just taking advantage of his momentary stupidity, that Tom hardly knew what had happened, till he found himself carried off.

The party which thus pounced on him was composed of the last remnants of the Indians, who had fought their way back through gauchos and soldiers. The latter had stopped to cluster round the body of the wounded Don Luis; and had relinquished the pursuit of the swift Indians.

Tom felt that they must have overlooked him and Curtis in the confusion, and even as he hung in the air between his captors, he wondered if poor "Pickle" was retaken.

For himself, he was hard and fast. A stout Indian had him by each arm, his pistol was gone, he hung suspended in the air between two galloping horses, with the pleasant certainty that if the Indians let him go, at that pace, he would be dashed to pieces by the shock.

Away went the wild horsemen over the dry plain in a cloud of dust. Tom's captors closed up together, gave a simultaneous heave, and brought the boy up on the back of a riderless horse that they came up with, and on each side of which they passed.

In all his troubles Tom could not help admiring the easy grace with which everything the Chaco Indians did on horseback was performed. The horse on which he was placed belonged to the Indian who carried off "Pickle." When "Plug" shot the master, the horse roamed loose. When its comrades came up, it joined them with a joyful neigh. Then the two Indians, still holding Tom, galloped up behind, on each side, and with one swing tossed the boy on the animal's back.

It was done with as much nonchalance as if they had been all standing on firm ground, instead of riding barebacked horses at speed. Tom found himself going at a tremendous rate now, faster than when he was carried by the difference of his weight. The Indians held him on each side as before, and yelled to the horses to encourage them to keep up.

"Plug," as we know, was a good rider; but he was used to the saddle, and the wild leaps of the untamed steed were different to the smooth canter of the gauchos' horses. Had it not been for the help of the warriors on either side, he might even have fallen off.

But as he got more used to the motion, he recovered his habitual coolness; and began to look round him. He found that the party to which he was attached was much larger in numbers than he had supposed. In spite of the dust and confusion, he could count fifteen heads near him; and every now and then a fresh cloud of dust, with a wild-looking figure in the midst of it, announced the accession of a fresh member to the party.

Tom looked all round for Curtis. He felt sure "Pickle" must have been taken a second time, from the direction in which he had left him, but he could see nothing of his friend.

Then he looked at his own immediate captors.

The one on the right was a tall, withered old man, with a frame that looked still the very perfection of agility. Lean as it was, the hard bunches of muscle stood out all over his limbs, and seemed to be connected with steel wires, so sharply did the tendons show. The face of this old man was like the head of an eagle, so keen and piercing was his glance. Like all the rest, his firmly-set jaw was unincumbered with beard. His hair, cut short in front to keep it out of his eyes, flowed down his back, or floated behind over the croup of his flying steed like a cascade of silver. The whiteness of his hair was almost the only sign of age about him, for he sat as firm and rode as fast as the youngest warrior there.

Tom was not ill pleased at the looks of this, his chief captor. The old man wore a band of solid gold round his forehead, bracelets on his arms, of the same metal, and a girdle of gold around his waist, from which hung a crimson cloth that was folded round his loins. Resting on his breast, Tom observed, with surprise, a necklace of huge emeralds.

It was evident that the old man must be a chief of high rank. Tom turned to his left-hand neighbor, and beheld the handsomest man he had ever seen. At least six feet high, with very broad shoulders, this Indian, nevertheless, was as graceful in contour as a boy. His loins were delicately rounded, hands and feet like a girl's, and his dark, keen face had great almond-shaped eyes, like those of a deer. He reminded Tom of a beautiful statue he had once seen, called *The Flying Mercury*, so light and active did his figure look. His hair was just as long as that of the old chief, but it was as black as the raven's wing, and shone like satin. The grasp of both these Indians was like iron on the boy's arms, slight though they seemed in frame.

Tom was a stout lad, as we know, but he felt perfectly helpless in the hands of these two men. Surrounded as he was, by clouds of dust, and going he knew not whither, there was yet a certain sense of wild freedom in the rapid passage through the air that exhilarated him. He was a captive, and yet he felt free. In this flying cloud of horsemen, Tom's was a wild, adventurous spirit. He had heard the most glowing accounts of these Chaco Indians, and now he thought to himself:

"I shall see them at home, and find out all about them. I can always find a way to escape at last."

In fact, there seemed to be every probability that he would see just as much of these Indians as heart could desire. They were going at a pace that put at defiance the utmost efforts of their pursuers, and Tom did not feel at all sure that they had any pursuers at all. He could but remember that Don Luis Garcia was desperately wounded, perhaps killed. He had seen him run through the body and thrown to the ground. With the fall of Don Luis the leader of any pursuit was taken away, and Tom felt pretty sure that it would end at once.

He was the more convinced of this from the fact that the Indians began to slacken their pace and talk together, after they had ridden for about an hour longer.

Then the old chief on his right let go his arm, and spoke to his captive in broken Spanish:

"Sit up on the horse, or I spear you."

Tom nodded good-humoredly. He had already made up his mind on the course he should pursue.

He was not going to give the Indians an excuse to ill-treat him.

The young warrior on his left let go of his arm, and addressed to him the single Spanish word:

"*Cuidado!*"—"take care!"

Then they galloped on beside him, spear in hand, while Tom had leisure to look around him. By this time he was used to the motion of the barebacked horse, and although the one he rode had no bridle, yet he found no difficulty in sticking on and maintaining his balance. The numbers of the Indians had increased by this time. There were at least forty men around him, all alike in figure, dress and arms, tall, sinewy fellows, with a small cloth around the loins, armed with spear, knife and bolas.

The old chief was the only man who wore an ornament, and on him the whole wealth of his tribe seemed concentrated.

There was no way for him to escape yet; Tom felt confident of that. Manuel had told him that the Chaco Indians were noted for being able to get more speed out of a horse than any gaucho, and yet the latter were, as we know, beautiful riders.

The boy was quite surrounded with these modern Centaurs, and felt that an attempt to escape would only insure his death. So he continued to ride on with his captors, willingly enough to all appearance.

The Indians now slackened their pace, for the first time since they started with Tom, and as the dust cleared away, the lad was able to look at the face of the country round him.

There was nothing to serve as a landmark anywhere. The same flat, undeviating plain that had surrounded Don Luis's estancia, now spread around the roving party of Indians. The only difference was, that not a dwelling nor an animal was to be seen. In the far distance to the west Tom distinguished the ragged blue line of a chain of mountains, and a few ombu trees were to be found here and there, at long intervals, over the plain, but there were no signs of human habitation near them.

Tom turned round on his horse and looked to the rear. The same unvarying plain met his eye there, but there were more moving figures on it. From two different quarters he could see herds of horses coming, each driven by wild-looking figures with long lances.

The party to which he belonged now halted to allow the others to come up. It was evident that they were friends, probably subdivisions of the same band.

In another twenty minutes they were together; and the spoils, consisting of several hundred horses, were sent careering past at a rapid pace. Tom's captors fell in behind, and continued their flight, and the whole band rode together. Tom could see that there were over a hundred men, all told, and the fact convinced him that it must be a whole tribe, for the numbers of the Chaco Indians are known to be very small.

It was a fact that did not surprise Tom very much, to find his friend Jack Curtis a prisoner to the second band. He had anticipated it, from the time he saw Don Luis wounded. He knew that, pursuit once checked, the audacious Indians would not hesitate to dash back and scoop up what prisoners they could, and what booty could be driven away with most rapidity. They had been close to poor Pickle, and had run him off, together with all the loose horses they could find.

Poor "Pickle" was in a sad condition.

At the best, as we know, he was but a poor rider. Transferred from a saddle to a bare-backed horse, he was all abroad in his calculations. Unable to sit there alone, the Indians had hit on a novel but simple and effectual way of keeping him there. A man on each side had dropped his lance over across the shoulder of Jack's horse, his neighbor catching the lance by the point so that the boy could cling to the staves, if he found himself slipping off. Simple as the means was, it was all-sufficient. Jack held on like grim death, and if he seemed disposed to let go from weariness, a man behind pricked him up with his lance.

But, unused as he was to riding, and compelled to trust to his hands for help, the poor fellow was nearly exhausted.

Tom saw him, and that he recognized him, but it was no use to either of them. The Indians would not allow them to speak to each other. All through the hot, dusty day they galloped along, and when night came they were alone on the vast pampas, safe from any pursuit.

CHAPTER XIV. WILD LIFE.

PRECISELY at sunset, the marauders halted and went into camp. The process of encamping was of the simplest nature. While the main body halted, a few horsemen dashed ahead round the herd of stolen steeds, headed them off, and brought them to a stand-still. Then every man leaped off his horse, turned it loose, and the thing was done. The hungry and tired creatures set to work to graze, and the men stalked through the herds to a common center, where they proceeded to encamp.

Each stuck his lance in the ground, several drew forth from their girdles the little pieces of wood wherewith they make fire, and proceeded to rub in rivalry.

Tom Bullard and Jack Curtis, thoroughly exhausted, fell on the ground together in the midst of the circle of Indians; but, tired as they were, they could not help watching the process of fire-kindling with great interest.

The fire-sticks were two in number, a flat piece of soft wood, and a hard, pointed stick. The Indian who was fire-making rested the flat piece on the

ground, and worked the pointed piece rapidly up and down till he dug a short groove in the other, the end of which was full of fine wood powder. First this powder began to smoke, and finally a dull red spark became visible under the rapid friction. In the nursing of that spark, every warrior was an adept. It was blown brighter and brighter, fed with more dry wood powder, covered with dry grass, and finally fanned into a flame.

In less than ten minutes from the time of the bait, a roaring fire was blazing in the midst of a great circle of Indians, and a mare was down, close to the fire, her throat cut, and the meat in rapid process of division among a hungry crowd.

The Chaco Indian shows great judgment in camping. In the place they had chosen was plenty of wood and water, the great things to be desired.

As our two captives looked round them, they saw that they must be near the banks of a river, for there was a heavy belt of timber not far off, the first they had yet seen. The Indians were constantly going and coming from this, bearing dry branches of dead wood to feed the fire, which roared higher and larger every moment.

Several other fires, were, in the process of lighting close by and all were scattered along the edge of the wood, handy for fuel. But poor Jack, at least, was too sore and tired to enjoy the scene. He had been bumping about on the sharp backbone of a pampas pony all day, till he had lost several inches of skin, and every muscle ached from its unaccustomed use. Where he had fallen, he lay, too wretched to rise.

Bullard was not quite so bad. He was pretty sore, but he had been used to that of old, and moreover he felt very hungry. After a short rest he turned to Curtis.

"Say, Pickle, wouldn't you like something to eat?"

"No," groaned Jack; "I'm too sore to eat. Oh, I wish I'd never come out with Manuel."

Tom laughed. He was of different stuff from most boys.

"Why, what's the matter?" he asked.

"Matter!" echoed Jack. "Isn't this matter enough? Not two days out in this country, and here we are, prisoners to a lot of savages! Why didn't Don Luis tell us of this?"

"Because he didn't know it," said Tom. "These Indians have not come down into the provinces before for many years. So Manuel told me, when we were saddling up. There must be some special reason for it."

Jack groaned.

"I don't want to know why they came. I only know they've got us, and we'll be made slaves."

"Well, Pickle, we're both together. What's to hinder us escaping, when we've learned their language?"

"Escape!" said Jack, gloomily. "We can't do it. How could we get away? They're all perfect devils on horseback, and I can't ride worth a snap. They'd catch us both."

"See here, Pickle," said Tom, sturdily; "I'm ashamed of you. Are you going to knock under in this way? Suppose you can't ride. What's to hinder you learning? I thought I could ride, but these fellows can give me points, and beat me to fits. I'm going to learn from them. They say, up on the pampas, that a white man can always learn to beat an Injun. I reckon we two kin beat these fellows afore we've done. I'm going to try—that I know. So don't lie there, growling like a bear with a sore head, but come and get some grub."

And without more ado, the Western lad jumped up, and walked over to the nearest fire, where the carcass of one of the slaughtered mares still lay.

Tom had kept possession of one weapon, his bowie-knife. It had escaped the notice of his captors, or else they had disdained to take it from him. At all events, he had it still.

Without the ceremony of asking leave, Tom drew his knife and cut a large piece off the haunch of the mare, which he stuck on a pointed stick and proceeded to toast at the fire.

The Indians, who were sitting around eating, never so much as looked at him, till he began to eat what he had cooked.

Then a tall, sinewy young warrior stalked up to him, plucked the piece out of his hand, and commenced to eat it himself with a grin of disdain.

Tom looked round him for a moment. Every Indian was looking at him, with gleaming eyes, as if to see how he would take the insult; and it flashed through his mind that his behavior now would determine his future treatment.

He quietly sheathed his knife, turned on the impudent robber, drew back his body to give impetus to the blow, and then butted forward his head into the Indian's stomach, with such force that the latter measured his length on the grass, and lay there, groaning, and crouched together, for the blow had knocked all the breath out of him. Tom picked up the meat, which the other had dropped, and quietly continued his meal.

He glanced around at the old chief, who sat near, and noticed that the latter looked at him with a grim smile, as if approving what he had done.

The discomfited warrior lay where he was knocked, for over a minute, groaning piteously. He seemed to be utterly astounded at the method of revenge chosen by Tom, as the Chaco Indians know nothing of the art of self-defense, save with lance and knife.

Tom watched him keenly. In a little while the savage rose up as if weak and sick, and slowly walked away. Then his companions began to laugh and jeer. The discomfited warrior turned hesitatingly around and made a step toward Tom, frowning angrily, and grasping his knife.

Tom saw that he had made an enemy whom he must either conciliate or completely conquer, if he hoped to have peace.

He chose the latter course. His foe was already half conquered, and the lad's gymnastic education stood him in good stead.

Tom made a sudden run forward at the surly warrior, leaped from the earth—an old gymnastic trick—and dashed both heels in his enemy's face, as the latter lifted his knife to stab him.

Again the Indian dropped, but this time he lay still. The vigorous kick of the Western lad had broken his nose and front teeth, besides knocking him senseless.

To be sure, the Indian knew nothing about what was coming, and Tom wore boots, against his enemy's bare feet; but none the less, the victory was decisive. The hitherto-stolid spectators laughed aloud; and the old chief, coming up to Tom, patted his head approvingly, and said in Spanish:

"My son—good—very good!"

Tom took the old man's hand and kissed it respectfully. He felt that his future was secured among the savages, as far as kind treatment went. Then he took away the remains of his piece of meat to poor Pickle, who still lay on his side, unwilling to move.

Tom shared his meat with his friend, and Jack found that he was hungry enough after all. True, the meat was horseflesh, but it came from a young and tender animal, and Jack pronounced it better than a good deal of beef he'd eaten—miles ahead of old Wolcott's beef.

The food put strength into Jack. When the meal was over, he did not seem so entirely despondent. The Indians left them alone, and they lay on a couch of soft grass between two large fires, near enough to be comfortable, for the night was cold and clear, after a day of intense heat.

Quite tired out, the two boys fell asleep, side by side, and did not wake till the raw, chilly morning air and the expiring fires combined to rouse them to the fact that the ground was white with hoar frost, and that the Indians were stirring.

Tom and Jack woke together, and were surprised to find that the stiffness was entirely gone from their limbs. They both felt as fresh as daisies, although Jack could not so readily replace his abrasions.

They did not know the secret of this. It was simple enough. They had been sleeping in the open air. Had they been under a roof in a close room, the next morning would have found their pains only partially gone. But fresh air works wonders, and always will, if people are not afraid to use it.

The Indians were stalking about, replenishing the fires, and getting ready for their breakfast.

"Tell you what, Pickle," observed "Plug." "I reckon we'd better be stirring. These fellows won't wait too long for us. So we'd better get something to eat before we start."

Jack agreed to this. He felt so much better that he began to look on his position much more resignedly. There is something in the pure air of the pampas that has a very exhilarating effect on all persons who come under its influence, and it is on record that most of the Indian captives, once in the Gran Chaco, become reconciled to their fate, and make few attempts to escape. This is even true of delicate girls, who become so much attached to the Indian way of life that they refuse to return home, when ransomed.

"Plug" and "Pickle" walked composedly to the fire, and cut their piece of meat off the remains of the mare's carcass. Jack had only a small pocket knife left, but it was better than nothing, and they both enjoyed their breakfast with the keen appetites of the pampas.

They had hardly swallowed it, when the old chief came up to them, accompanied by a broad, heavy-built Indian, much lighter in color than the rest, and who, moreover, wore a full black beard, though dressed, or rather undressed, like the others.

This man addressed them both in good Spanish.

"Senoritos, you must take off your clothes. It is the chief's orders."

"Si, si," said the old man, in his broken Spanish.

"Why, what's the matter?" ejaculated Tom. "I say, Pickle, here's a go. We're to take off our clothes."

Jack understood no Spanish, and he was amazed, when Tom had translated the demand.

"What are we to do that for?" he asked, sulkily.

"Because the chief orders it," said the Spanish Indian, angrily. "Do you suppose that I, who am a good Catholic, am to go naked, while you accursed heretics dress in velvet coats?"

Tom laughed.

"I see what you are," he boldly replied. "You're one of those renegades that want to bring every one down to your level."

The Spanish Indian flushed up angrily. Tom had hit the mark. Every criminal who flees from justice in the Argentine Confederation is sure to find a safe refuge among the Chaco Indians, if he can get to their territories. This man was an escaped murderer.

"Off with your clothes," he said, furiously; "we must all ride alike in this band, and woe betide you if you try to escape! You shall be cut into small pieces."

Here the chief said something in a strange language, and the renegade cooled down.

The cacique Nabadagua says that you may ride together to-day, but you must keep in the midst of the band, that no one may see you. We are to pass near Asuncion to-day.

The cacique is very kind," said Tom. "I hope he'll allow us to keep our trousers at least."

"Not a stitch of Spanish clothes," said the renegade, sternly. "You can wind these cloths around your waists, and that is all."

As he spoke he gave them each a crimson lion-cloth, such as the other Indians wore, and it became evident that the cacique was in earnest. It was a raw frosty morning to strip, to say nothing of the feelings of civilized people, but, resistance was useless. Jack and Tom were fain to strip off their clothes, which were thrown into the fire by the chief, and our two friends, equipped in the savage lion-cloth of the Abipones—the name of the tribe—felt as if the last link that united them to civilization was cut off in the act, and that they were doomed to hopeless slavery to barbarians.

The cold air made them shiver again, and they both remembered that they had nothing left to cover themselves at night. They covered over the fire, but not for long was that allowed. The Abipones sprung to their horses, the old chief Nabadagua signified to them that they must mount, and the two captives were compelled to catch their own horses, and clamber on as best they could.

How Jack Curtis envied the graceful, centaur-like Indians, as he saw the ease with which they leaped on their ponies, while he himself could hardly get on at all.

Tom was much more apt at vaulting, and was soon on the back of a wild horse, which reared and curveted, unable to throw him.

Poor Pickle at last succeeded in gaining his horse's back, and then the whole cavalcade started off at the same wild gallop as the day before, driving the herd of stolen animals before them.

Now the two captives made a fresh discovery about life in the open air.

It was this:

"I say, Plug," cried Curtis, "I don't know how it is with you, but I find it much easier to ride this way. I don't seem to slip about so much."

"Reckon you're right," said Tom, quietly. "I guess that half the secret of these fellows' riding lies in the rig."

And it was so. Instead of loose trousers, slipping about on the saddle, the bare skin of leg and thigh pressing the glossy skin of the horse, afforded the firmest possible hold.

Even Jack Curtis had profited from the rough riding-school of the day before. He sat his horse alone, with the help of a firm grasp of the mane, and rode steadily along in the midst of the band.

As for Plug, he felt that he was on his way to be a perfect horseman, and that comforted him for all his captivity. He studied the attitudes of the wild riders around him, taking hints from all he saw, and getting ready for the escape that he meditated.

They went off at the usual pace and rode steadily for hours and hours, till the hot sun began to beat down overhead. Then, just as the boys were getting used to the lack of clothing, and finding the luxury of free movement compensating for the exposure, the scouts ahead uttered a yell, and dashed off at full speed.

Tom and Jack followed with the crowd, at the same pace, and beheld a distant cloud of dust, through which loomed the lofty tilts of a troop of ox wagons.

At the same moment, down went the whole crowd of Indians, with a shrill yell, shaking their lances.

CHAPTER XV.

TROPA DE CARRETAS.

Boys, did you ever see a picture of a South American *carreta*? If you did, you will hardly forget it easily. It was a *tropa* or caravan of these curious vehicles that Tom and Jack were now charging in the center of their wild friends, the Abipones.

Even in the midst of the dust and confusion, Tom could not help being struck with the odd and picturesque appearance of this *tropa de carretas*.

The *carretas* were huge wagons, each as big as a small room, and supported on a single pair of wheels. But such wheels as these were! Each was higher than a man's head, and the huge axle of wood was up to his shoulders. There was not a nail in the whole concern, which was made of heavy timber, the wheels being some of them solid, the rest bound with tires of oxide instead of iron. These wooden wheels and axles kept up such a tremendous groaning and squealing from the want of grease that it could be heard a mile off when the whole *tropa* was in motion. The wagon was sheltered by a very lofty tilt, covered with oxhides, dressed with the hair on; and, as the oxen were of all colors, it produced a very curious effect. Outside the wagon-tilt, hung in loops of rope, were bundles of firewood, picked up on the pampas; for fuel is so scarce on these plains, that every man has to pick up stray sticks throughout the day's journey, if he hopes to have a good fire at night. The inside was hung full of pots and kettles, chairs, stools, old clothes, and what not, for the family seemed to be moving house and home, as indeed they were.

Each *carreta* was drawn by three or four yoke of oxen, who went swinging lazily along the pampas, up to the moment the Indians charged.

Then there was a change.

There were four *carretas* in the *tropa*, and three gauchos on horseback attending it. The whole was the property of a few neighboring families emigrating from the upper provinces toward Buenos Ayres.

As soon as the Indians gave their first yell and charged, the oxen halted as by one consent. The leaders, and all in front of the pole, turned round and began to struggle to get loose, bellowing frantically.

The three gauchos began to shout to the people in the wagons, and a man appeared in front of each *carreta*, while the shrill screams of women inside were plainly heard.

There were two sharp flashes, and Jack saw the same Indian, whom "Plug" had vanquished, throw

up his arms and fall back dead. A bullet from a gaucho carbine had done his work.

The next moment the Abipones, at the utmost speed of their horses, were down on the caravan. Each, as he came, shook his long cane lance till it quivered violently, to render the parry more difficult. They went at such a speed that the business was done in a moment. The three mounted gauchos fought bravely enough, but it was useless. Two of them were run through in the first rush; and although the third, who carried an old saber, managed to wound one of his foes, he was spitted by a second as cleanly as a cock spits a bird.

Tom and Jack were full of pity and horror as they saw the murder out they were unable to help the poor fellows, riding naked and unarmed as they were.

Then the Indians swarmed all round the halted *carretas*, spearing an ox in each team to prevent them moving off. They leaped off their horses, some of them, and dashed into the *carretas* front and rear, armed only with their knives.

Then there was a louder screaming than ever, mingled with shouts and curses in Spanish, as the drivers of the *carretas* struggled and fought with the savages.

Tom saw one of the Indians thrown violently out of a *carreta*, stabbed to the heart, just as a second leaped from the other end to the ground, carrying a beautiful young girl in his arms.

The girl was screaming and struggling violently, but the Indian ran to his horse, heedless of her cries. Then, out of the *carreta* leaped a stout, thick-set man, in gaucho dress, with a drawn knife, and made for the bold robber, cursing terribly.

At the same moment, down dashed a second Indian full speed by the first, and stopping as he passed, caught away the girl on the front of his horse, dropping his lance, which was caught by the other. In a moment more the docile horse had come to his master's whistle and the Indian was on his back.

But not soon enough to avoid a father's vengeance. Even as he grasped the rein, the infuriated gaucho caught him by the left arm, dragged him over by main force, and stabbed him again and again, cutting and hacking with the ferocity of a demon, even while the comrade of the Indian was carrying off the poor girl, shrieking "Padre! Padre!" in vain, for her father could not help her.

Then down came another Indian, shaking his lance, and ran the unhappy wretch through the body in a single instant.

One of the drivers on the *carretas* took out a bow and arrow to shoot at the robbers, when a fellow galloped by and lanced him through the back, so that he fell out, writhing in his death-agony.

Now the tropa was completely surrounded by the Abipones, who thrust in their long spears behind, killing the last remnants of the defenders, and carrying off the women and children on their horses. Then the cattle were unyoked and driven off, the torch was applied to the *carretas*, and the whole band moved away at a walk, leaving the burning wagons as the only evidence of the deed.

"That's rough, Pickle," said Tom Bullard, gloomily, as they rode off. "I believe if I'd had my revolver I'd have plugged one or two of those brutes. This Indian life isn't what it's cracked up to be. They're mean skunks, every one of 'em."

Jack sighed. His spirits were rapidly subsiding, and he felt very miserable.

"Ah, Plug, I fear we shall never see home again," he said.

"Yes, we shall," said Tom, stoutly. "I've made up my mind to get away from these fellows before I've done, and you'll see we both will. So dry up, you grumbler; keep a stiff upper lip, and some day we'll be telling all this to the folks in New York as a good story."

Jack shook his head and rode on. He had not the unflinching pluck of "Plug;" and, moreover, he was getting very sore and stiff again, a little worse than the day before.

So the band rode on at a foot-pace over the level pampas, having now eleven captives, all told. Besides our two boys, there were five women and four little children, carried by the different Indians. The women were all weeping bitterly, although they had ceased to scream and struggle, seeing the uselessness of resistance. The children, pale and trembling, sat in front of their captors, not daring even to cry.

The Indians on their part were by no means unkind to their captives, now the battle was over. They held the children carefully, played with and consoled them, and tried their best to comfort the girls.

"*Caranbo, senoritos!*" that was a good haul," said a voice close to Tom.

He looked round, and saw the black-bearded renegade Indian by his side. The man's lance-head was crusted with fresh blood, slowly drying.

"It was a good haul, *senoritos*," he continued, gayly. "Our Abipone chiefs love Spanish wives; and here are four beautiful girls, besides the old woman. *Cupita*, 'tis a jolly life, this raiding, and beats the towns all hollow."

"And do you mean to say," asked Tom, "that you, a Spaniard, can help these devils to murder your fellow-countrymen?"

"*Carrat!* et. Gil Verde owes the towns nothing but revenge." And the renegade's eyes flashed fire. "Senorito, you have a bold tongue, but I like you for it. I saw you trounce Cabido this morning, and I swore to be your friend if you would let me. If you choose to keep up the sulks and make me an enemy, so much the worse for you. As for me, I care not. Come, which shall it be?"

Tom looked steadily at the other for some minutes before he answered.

Gil Verde had a frank, bold face, coarse and reckless enough, but not sneaking or mean. The lad

thought to himself: "It's no use to make an enemy of this man. He may help me."

So he held out his hand.

"Let us be friends, Gil Verde, while we are comrades. It's not your fault I'm a captive, I suppose."

Gil Verde winked.

"You'll not be a captive long, my friend. I can tell you that much. The cacique Nabidagua was so much charmed with your courage and address that he is going to adopt you as his son and make you a war-chief, as soon as you are safe."

This was good news to Tom. It promised to make his captivity light.

"But my comrade, what of him?" he asked, pointing to Jack, who rode sadly on beside him, indifferent to the conversation, not understanding Spanish.

Gil Verde shrugged his shoulders.

"Ah, well, I cannot say. That kind of prisoner gets little mercy. He'll have to work in the fields, I suppose. He's sulky, and they'll whip it out of him."

Tom resolved to warn his friend.

"But those children, what will they do with them?" he asked.

"Oh, they're all right," said the renegade. "They'll bring them up as their own children, and adopt them into the tribe. A few years hence you'll not be able to tell them from pure Abipones."

"Poor little creatures!" said Tom, involuntarily.

"Bah," said Gil, contemptuously; "for what? They'll be far happier roaming the Chaco as free, naked barbarians than cooped up on some stupid estancia, fettered with hot clothes and unable to go where they list. Who can be happier than we are?"

We need no clothes, for we accustom ourselves to all weathers. We need no houses while we have the woods and the pampas. We need no food, for it grows in plenty round us. We have horses in thousands, and roam wherever we please, to the four winds of heaven. Are we tired of war? We fly to the inmost recesses of the Chaco, where we are going now. Not all the armies of the Argentine republic dare to disturb us there. Do we long for excitement? 'Tis but to call up the horses, and away we go on a raid. We need no fire-arms, for we ride as swift as the balls, and we laugh while we dodge them. I tell you, *senorito*, no one knows what happiness is but we Indians of the Chaco. The time will come when you won't leave us if you get the chance."

"How did you come to join them, Gil, or are you, too, a captive?"

The renegade's brow darkened and he tugged nervously at his beard ere answering.

"It's a long story, *senorito*. I don't care to tell it more than this. I was a peon in the service of a rich *estanciero*, and I quarreled with my master. Do you know what a peon is, *senorito*? A creature that has no rights against a rich man, if they go to law. My master wanted the same girl I did. He took her from me, and I got even with him. I stabbed him. Then the hue and cry was out after me, and I fled to the Abipones. I have never regretted it. Now I am any man's equal."

"But does it not go to your heart to see those poor girls carried away?" said Tom, pointing to the beautiful young creature whose father had been killed before her eyes. "You remember how you felt when your girl was taken from you?"

It will be noticed that Tom had lost most of his reckless ways of speech and slang in talking to the renegade. Indeed, he felt very serious, and different from what he usually was.

Gil Verde laughed bitterly.

"Bah, *senorito*; Rosita was not carried off. The rich *estanciero* fooled her with a pair of gold earrings and a silk dress. All women are the same. You'll see that girl as happy as a bird in a few months. They'll cry at first, but they end in loving these wild chiefs and the Chaco better than the towns. This time next year not one of those girls would leave our band. *Madre mia!* we are all half Spanish. Spanish mothers have been the rule for many a long year. There is not a man in the band but has more or less Spanish blood in his veins; and we get our wives like the old Romans did."

Tom said no more. He did not believe the wild renegade, and he had resolved at least to try to save the young girl he had noticed. She was a particularly beautiful creature, of the dark Spanish type, with large, melting black eyes that haunted Tom, as they seemed to appeal to him for help.

He had no particular idea of what he was going to do, but something he made up his mind to do, to save the girl.

He turned away to Jack Curtis, with whom he could converse in English without being understood, and remarked:

"Pickle, they're going to make me a chief when they get home. The old chief in the gold and spangles is going to adopt me for his son. What do you think of that, old fellow?"

Jack sighed. He was sorer than ever.

"I don't know. You're always lucky, Plug, and I shall always be the same Pickle. What's he going to adopt you for?"

"Cause I whipped that ornary sneak that tried to steal my grub," said Tom, laughing. "Why don't you do something, Pickle?"

"I don't know what to do. I'm too stiff and tired to do anything," said the once-upon-a-time "Pickle."

"I believe if a fellow was to steal my grub, I'd sit down and cry, I feel so weak and miserable."

Tom looked at him in silence a moment.

"And yet you used to be cock of the school," he said, sorrowfully; "and the fellows declared you could lick old Wolcott, if you were to try."

Jack groaned.

"I wish I was back there, spider puddings and all."

Bullard couldn't help laughing at the mournful face of poor "Pickle."

It was near sunset, and they had ridden over sixty miles that day. To a boy fresh from shipboard, three days before, the trial was unusually severe. Tom, who was an accomplished horseman, felt it deeply. Poor "Pickle" was nearly done up.

But Tom knew that this would not be the case next day, after a good night's rest. He had made up his mind that Jack should become a hero among the Indians as well as himself, for "Pickle" had been the best gymnast at old Wolcott's, and Tom knew that he could perform many feats that he himself could not.

He looked around him as the sun sloped downward, and found that they were leaving the pampas, and entering a lovely and varied country, where large woods alternated with hills, and beautiful streams meandered through the grass.

"Where are we?" he asked of Gil Verde.

"We are entering the Gran Chaco," said the renegade.

In the golden sunset the band came to a final halt in the midst of a busy scene. They had reached the Abipones' home.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE CARAVAN.

THREE months had passed away since the Abipones made their daring raid into the Argentine provinces, but the country had sunk into quiet. It might be supposed that the government would have made some efforts to punish the bold marauders, but the Argentine government has found out too often the uselessness of pursuing the Chaco Indians, to be ready to risk her troops in any more vain expeditions. Besides this, the standing army of the Confederation is very small, and the few squadrons of cavalry have enough work to patrol the frontier for defense, not to think of aggression.

Don Luis was obliged to bear his losses as he best could, and get well the quickest he knew how. Thanks to the pure and invigorating air of the pampas, it did not take him long.

One morning in November, when the sharp frosts of the night before had gemmed the long grass with myriads of diamonds, a caravan of huge ox-wagons, a veritable *tropa de carretas*, emerged from the shallow stream of the Salado river at a seldom used ford, and took its slow way over a level green plain to the northward. The caravan had entered the recesses of the Gran Chaco.

White men were never before seen there, except as prisoners, but this caravan pushed boldly on. The men in charge of it knew well that the Salado was the south-west boundary of a dangerous country. There were men among its attendants who had been prisoners themselves to the Indians, and knew well their mode of warfare. Left to themselves, these men would never have willingly entered the Gran Chaco.

But at the head of this caravan was a man whom no danger could daunt until he had tried it, a man who had seen other countries besides the pampas, and who knew the advantages given by modern science over uncivilized savages.

On a lofty and precipitous bluff, overlooking the plain below, stood Don Luis Garcia, with his son Manuel and Louis Ledoux. Don Luis was armed with a powerful telescope, with which he swept the horizon all round, frequently turning it downward on the caravan.

Besides the telescope, both he and his companions were well armed with more substantial weapons. Don Luis carried a pair of revolvers in his belt, and a Winchester rifle at his back; Manuel was similarly armed; and even "Kitty" sported a revolver and light rifle.

You must not suppose, either, that "Kitty" did not know how to use them. Manuel had taken good care to set him to work daily to practice with them, till the boy could put all the bullets of his revolver inside a hat, at twenty-paces.

Don Luis looked thin and pale, but for all that he was perfectly recovered of his wound. Three months does wonders with a healthy man in a healthy climate.

The tropa below them belonged entirely to himself; it was manned with his own peons; and with it he had started as soon as he could ride, to rescue his young friends from the clutches of the Abipones. He knew well enough where they were, and came prepared to ransom the prisoners if possible, if not, to fight for them.

"Well, boys," he said, after he had examined the prospect, "there are no enemies in sight yet. I think we shall get near their town without being seen."

Manuel turned around and looked earnestly across the Salado, in the direction in which they had come. "What are those fellows following us for?" he asked.

Don Luis turned the glass on a distant cloud of dust and inspected it carefully. When he put down the telescope he said:

"It is a troop of cavalry. I wonder if they are ordered to stop us? It may well be so. The government is so much afraid of the Gran Chaco, that they are ashamed to see others daring its dangers alone. Let us go down to the tropa. I will not be stopped now."

The distant cloud of dust was rapidly approaching the river's bank. Already the bright glitter of arms could be seen with the naked eye, and the forms of horsemen at a gallop.

Don Luis and the boy scrambled down the side of the bluff and were soon at the head of their caravan, which was halted close to the bluff, at a word from the leader.

Then Don Luis mounted his horse and issued an order.

"Form corral—quick—march!"

There were six *carretas* in the *tropa*, and the two leading wagons were instantly turned inward so as to cross each other, while the two middle ones were drawn up close to them on each side, and the last pair were turned inward. When the evolution was completed, all the teams were inside a square formed of wagons, and two gauchos, with loaded rifles, guarded each opening. Then the estanciero quietly awaited the coming of the troop of cavalry.

The latter were already at the opposite bank of the river, and, as they watched them, rode into the ford and struggled slowly across.

In a few minutes more they came galloping up, and the officer in command, a fine, handsome man, strong and bluff-looking, with a jolly, hearty face, called out:

"Halt! Dismount! Rest!"

Then he jumped off his horse, drew the reins over the animal's head, and led him forward to the corral of wagons, where Don Luis was awaiting him, in doubt as to what to make of it all.

This officer seemed to have no fear of being shot at, or not to care for it, if he did. He advanced unconcernedly to the wagons, till he was stopped by a sonorous "Halt!" and the click of a rifle-lock. Then he paused, and called out, in a laughing tone:

"Why, Don Luis, is this the way you receive your friends? Don't you remember Captain Hernandez?"

Then the boys saw Don Luis start, as if he recognized the voice. He jumped off his horse, came out of the corral, and advanced to meet the officer.

"Why, is it possible, Don Alonzo?" he exclaimed.

"I thought you were in Spain."

The officer laughed.

"So I was, amigo, till last year. Then, as there was no more fighting to be done over there, I thought I would take service here. They've given me a troop, as you see, and already they call me a promising officer. But what are you doing here?"

Don Luis told him the story, and Captain Hernandez looked grave. He was an old schoolmate of the estanciero, and the two had been much together in their youth. Captain Hernandez was a soldier who had served in many armies, and had finally drifted into the Argentine forces, as he had said.

"It's strange how events turn out," he remarked. "Do you know that I am on a very similar errand myself?"

"No!" said the estanciero, surprised. "I thought you came after me by orders, to stop me."

"Not a bit of it. I am bound to the Grand Chaco myself."

"And what for? Under orders?"

"No. I am on leave of absence."

"On leave of absence! This is a strange place to come to spend one."

"Strange or not, here I am."

"But your men, who are they, and why do they follow you?"

"They are on leave also."

"But I don't understand. Explain this mystery."

"Willingly. You see, Luis, that since I came here, I fell in love. I was engaged to as lovely a girl as you ever saw. Her name was Inez Lozada, and her father lived in Santa Fe. We were to be married at Christmas, and old Lozada had determined to move down to an estancia near Rosario, before the wedding. She was his only daughter, and he wanted to be near us. It is now about three months ago, since he started on his journey with four *carretas*, and disappeared."

"Disappeared! Why, how could that be?"

"No one knew. I did not hear of it till a month ago, and then I took a long scout to find where they had gone. I found—what think you, Luis?"

"What? I cannot tell, but I suspect—the Indians."

"Ay, the Indians. I found the charred wheels of the *carretas*, the half-burned skeletons of several men, and a breastpin, that I recognized as hers. It was all plain. The accursed Indians had murdered them."

"When was this?" inquired Don Luis, eagerly.

"I cannot tell exactly. There were no tracks left, so it must have been some time ago."

"But your friends started from Santa Fe, when?"

"Three months ago to-day."

"Then it must be the same, Hernandez. There has only been one raid from the Gran Chaco this summer, and your friends must have been taken by the same band that harried my estancia. But what are you going to do?"

"I am going to rescue Inez and take vengeance on the Indians," said the captain, coolly. "If I don't make their tribe pay for that murder, you can call me a coward."

"But how did you get your leave of absence?" inquired Don Luis. "Does the government suspect your object?"

"The president has given me the leave himself. The real fact is that I am on a secret mission, with a troop of picked men, to explore the Chaco, and lay a foundation for a second expedition."

"Then why should we not join forces?"

"The very thing I was about to propose. I have a guide who has engaged to take me to the Abipone stronghold. He was once a prisoner of them."

"So have I. Three of my men have been prisoners at different times. Then it is settled. We can resume our journey."

"Certainly. But who are those boys, looking so curiously at us?"

Don Luis beckoned to Manuel and "Kitty," who were watching the interview with great interest. They came forward, and he presented his son to the captain.

"But surely," said Hernandez, smiling, "this little fellow is too young to encounter all these dangers."

And he turned to "Kitty," who was eying the captain's brilliant uniform and bold face with great admiration. Louis had learned to talk Spanish very well in three months, for it is one of the easiest of all languages to learn. He looked boldly up and answered:

"Señor capitano, I can shoot as straight as a man, and I can stop a bullet as well as you."

Hernandez laughed and patted his head.

"You are a brave lad, I see. That is half the battle."

"I don't know that, sir," said Louis, modestly; "but I know I couldn't stay behind while poor Tom is in danger. I must help him."

Then Don Luis cut off further conversation by the order—

"Break corral! Forward march!"

The wagons were turned out of the inclosure and resumed their march, and the estanciero and his men mounted their horses again. By this time Louis was quite a good rider, for daily practice had rendered him expert.

As soon as he was on his horse, he turned again to watch Captain Hernandez. "Kitty" thought he had never seen any one half as dashing and brilliant as this officer, as he stood there waiting for the caravan to get out of the way. His horse, a beautiful dapple-gray stallion, was rearing up, frightened at the ungainly *carretas*, and his master was soothing him with a laughing carelessness that told of the perfect horseman. His uniform was much like the gaucho dress in shape, but the colors were more brilliant, and it was loaded with gold lace.

On his head he wore the singular military cap of Buenos Ayres, a square bag with a tassel at the corners, front and rear. The cap was scarlet, the tassels and band of gold. His loose jacket was of blue velvet, heavily laced; and his trousers and swathing cloth of white and crimson, while his huge spurs were of solid silver. As he stood there, soothing his fractious horse, Louis thought he had never seen a finer figure.

Presently the *carretas* drew out of the way, and the horse came down, and began fidgeting to get away. Captain Hernandez motioned to one of his men, who rode up on the other side and pressed the horse in toward his master. In a moment the officer was on his back, and digging in his spurs till the spirited horse reared and plunged again.

"Prepare to mount! Mount!" he cried.

Then Louis saw the soldiers spring to their horses, stout, stalwart men, looking as strong as bulls, wearing cuirasses of brass that glittered like gold, and the same blue and red uniform with square caps that all the cavalry wore in those parts.

Captain Hernandez's men were picked warriors, and seemed to be much better armed than the generality of troops down there, for they carried breech-loading rifled carbines, as well as sabers, and a revolver apiece.

"Let me see the Abipones who will attack us," quoth the captain, as he glanced proudly over the united array. "Fifty-three rifles are more than the best of them can stand."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE JAGUAR.

The caravan had traveled all day long through a delightful country, on a grassy plain of black, rich soil, as level as a billiard table, but not wearing the unvarying monotony of the pampas. It varied in breadth from five to fifteen miles, and was bordered by the same line of bluffs, on one side, on which Don Luis had been standing when Manuel first saw the soldiers. On the other side, a belt of timber marked the course of the Paraguay river, and sent out spurs of wood along the banks of numerous tributaries.

At evening they came to a halt in a spot of singular beauty. The bluffs had ceased, and were only continued in an irregular rolling range of hillocks. Several small streams ran between these on their way to the Paraguay, bordered with graceful forests of palm-trees. They had arrived in the midst of a little natural theater by the banks of a stream, where an open glade was formed by the recession of the palm-trees, while down the center of the glade ran a narrow but well-defined path to the water.

Louis was riding ahead with Captain Hernandez, when he saw this path, and instinctively pulled up, saying:

"Indians must be near, captain. Look at that path."

The captain bent over from the saddle and scanned the path closely.

"There is no danger," he said, quietly. "It is only a drinking-path for the game. It must be in plenty here."

Almost at the same instant, a large herd of black creatures, with white lips, looking much like small pigs, and grunting in the same manner, dashed out of some bushes, and plunged past them into the cover beyond, with a great racket.

Louis started and turned pale, asking:

"What are those creatures?"

"Peccaries," said Captain Hernandez, laughing. "It's just as well we didn't offend them, or we should have to run if we couldn't kill them all."

The wagons were some little way behind still, and the captain drew his revolver.

"Come, my boy," he said; "let us explore this place, and look sharp for Indians. We'll go into camp here, if the coast's clear."

Louis felt very proud as he followed the captain, for the latter seemed to trust him as if he had been a soldier. He drew his own pistol and rode close behind the captain, watching every bush, as the officer explored the edges of the glade.

Presently there came another rush. Louis thought it was another herd of peccaries, but refrained from

firing. Then a crowd of animals, larger than a peccary and differently shaped, scudded across the glade, dashed headlong into the river, and disappeared.

"What are those, captain?" he called out.

The officer made no answer for a moment, and a fresh squad of the curious creatures dashed out. In a twinkling Captain Hernandez had fired three shots, and two of the creatures dropped and lay kicking, while the rest ran into the river.

"Capivaras, those are," said Hernandez, pointing to the carcasses.

Louis looked at them and laughed, for they were curious animals.

They were something in shape between a rabbit and a pig, having the innocent face and cloven lip of the former, with its habit of staying squatted together when at rest. Its hair and general form were otherwise pig-like, but its feet were hare-like and the toes were united by a web. The capivara or capincha is a slow, clumsy creature on land, but always keeps close to the water, to escape when pursued. It weighs about a hundred pounds, full-grown.

"Now, my lad," said Captain Hernandez, "don't be too quick. This place is full of game, and if I mistake not there's more than game. Those capinchas wouldn't have rushed so close to us, if something had not been after them. Yes, *por Dios!* and there he is."

As he spoke, he pointed into the shadow of the thicket, and Louis caught a glimpse of a large animal creeping toward them, almost invisible among the bright flowers and yellowish grass.

"Away, boy; it is a jaguar!" said the captain, hurriedly; and they both wheeled their horses and galloped away.

A jaguar it was, sure enough, and the next moment it sprang from the covert with a loud roar, and came bounding after them. The horses, frantic with terror, stretched themselves out flat and exerted every muscle to escape, but the jaguar, in three springs, had laid his great paw on the croup of Louis's pony, when the lad, with an instinctive effort, lifted his feet into the saddle, and made a tremendous spring forward, as the horse sunk with a cry of terror under the claws of the monster.

The jaguar did not pursue Louis. He seemed to be satisfied with his prey, and stood lashing his tail to and fro over the fallen horse, and roaring savagely, as much as to say:

"Come on, if you dare!"

Captain Hernandez heard the boy scream, and wheeled his horse.

As Louis ran up, Hernandez leaned from the saddle and caught him up in front of him, when they both galloped out of the glade, just as the *carretas* halted at the entrance.

Several soldiers had ridden to the front, hearing the noise, and the captain shouted:

"A jaguar! a jaguar! Follow me, three of you! Advance, carbines!"

Louis jumped down, so as not to incur his friend, and Manuel and the estanciero galloped to the front with the soldiers.

In a moment they were in the glade, and there stood the jaguar over the fallen horse, defiant as ever. It was plain that his kind had never been hunted with fire-arms before, or he would not have been so bold. Animals learn from experience, and this fellow had never met any thing but Chaco Indians, who gave him a wide berth.

Now he was to deal with different hunters. Captain Hernandez dashed by him at the top of his horse's speed, the spurs well in to keep the animal straight. As he passed he sent two bullets into the jaguar, who uttered a furious snarl, and sprang at him like a flash.

But the dapple-gray charger was already past him, and the fierce creature missed his aim. The captain wheeled round, rushed by him again, and fired his last shot into the jaguar's side. The rest could see the blood spurt out to the bullet.

Again the jaguar charged the captain, who scampered away, leaving the beast in front of the rest of the party, who had halted behind.

Crack! crack! crack! went the soldiers' carbines.

Another bullet struck the jaguar, who only seemed stung to fresh fury. In a moment he turned and charged the soldiers, and met, full in his course, with a new obstacle.

Don Luis had dismounted, and now stood in front of his horse, rifle in hand.

As the jaguar charged him, he raised his piece with a deliberation very different from the shots of the others, and fired full into the creature's broad breast.

The jaguar was rising to spring, as he fired, and leaped into the air with a fearful roar, then came heavily down, and rolled over, stone dead, at the estanciero's feet!

The soldiers could hardly believe their eyes when they saw the animal that had defied so many shots dropped by a single ball, but the mystery was explained when they examined the skin.

Captain Hernandez' bullets had all struck, but only one in a dangerous spot, the lungs. The other bullets, pistol and rifle, had merely grazed the skin, or drawn blood from slight flesh wounds.

Don Luis was the only one who had made his mark. There was a hole in the jaguar's breast such as you could put your fist in, and a torrent of blood was pouring from it.

"So much for modern improvements," remarked the estanciero, quietly, as Captain Hernandez rode up. "I didn't make so much noise, but I think that fellow looks dead enough."

Captain Hernandez looked at the light rifle carried by his friend. The bore was quite small. Then he looked at the great hole in the jaguar's breast and seemed astonished. It was six times as big as the

bullet, and thin blue smoke was curling from the orifice.

"Why, what in the name of St. Hubert, the patron of hunting, have you been shooting with, Luis?" he asked.

"A shell," said the estanciero, quietly. "I bought this gun in New York, and I'm quite satisfied with it. They told me it would kill the biggest beast instantaneously, and you see it has. Let us go into camp here and skin the jaguar."

"The very place for a camp," said the captain. "I had it picked out. The plenty and tameness of the game argues that it has not been hunted, so there are no Indians here, and we can shoot all the food we want to-night, when the creatures come to drink."

In a very short time their simple preparations were made. The sun was near setting as the wagons filed slowly into the open glade, and went into corral. Then the weary oxen were turned loose to graze under a guard, fires were kindled, and the two capivaras were speedily roasted, beside a couple of light, graceful creatures resembling deer, but smaller. These had been shot upon the Chaco during the morning's journey, and were nothing but wild goats of the country, swift as antelopes, and known as *corzuelas*.

Together with the capivaras, there were about four hundred pounds of meat, and all ate game that night. There was no lack of *charque*—dried beef—in the wagons; but who would eat dried beef when they could get fresh game?

Certainly not our friends of the *tropa*. They sat around the fires, the soldiers and gauchos smoking their pipes after supper, and telling stories about Indians.

Louis was amused at the curious pipes carried by the gauchos, made of a gourd full of water, in which the pipe bowl was set, so that the smoke came through the water with a bubbling sound, as the gauchos sucked at the cane stems.

There was another curious thing that he saw, which at first he took for another sort of pipe. It was in the hands of a grizzled old sergeant of Hernandez' troop, whom the other men called a Paraguayan.

He held in his hand a gourd with a narrow neck, out of which a thin steam curled out, while a stem like that of a pipe was put into the place where the bowl is in common pipes.

The old sergeant was sucking away at this tube, but Louis noticed that he did not puff out any smoke. He seemed to swallow all.

"Certainly," thought Louis, "he's a funny smoker."

Presently the old sergeant took out the stem, threw some drops out of the gourd, and went to the fire. Thence he took a tin pot, which was boiling there, and poured some of its contents into the gourd. Then he sat down and sucked away contentedly.

Louis sidled up to him.

"Please, senior sergeant, what is that thing you have?"

"*Mia lemtalia*," said the sergeant, laconically.

"Your bombilla. What's that for?"

"To drink my mate," and the old fellow sucked away.

Then the boy understood that the sergeant was only drinking his tea, for *mate* is the Paraguayan's substitute for tea, made of the leaves of the Paraguayan holly, dried and beaten to powder. It is always drunk in South America, morning, noon and night, and may be called the national drink.

By the time Louis had finished looking at the bombilla, he was summoned to examine the skin of the jaguar, which had just been stripped off.

Then they found the execution which had been done by the shell, for the whole of the lungs and stomach of the jaguar were found mangled and torn to rags in the most extraordinary manner.

Captain Hernandez looked thoughtfully at the carcass. He had in his hand a measuring tape, with which he had been measuring the length of the jaguar's skin.

"*Madre de Dios, Don Luis*," he said, "it is lucky that your shell went where it did. That fellow might have made mincemeat of us all otherwise. How much do you suppose he measures to the foot of his tail?"

"About four feet," said Don Luis.

"Five feet six inches," said the captain. "I tell you these Chaco tigers are getting bigger as we get away from the settlements. We shall have them as big as royal tigers before we're done."

"Well," said the estanciero, "big or little, my rifle will lay them low. And so now, Alonso, let us set our guard and put out the fires. We don't want the whole of the Gran Chaco to know our business."

In half an hour the cattle were safe in the corral, the fires out, and the guards were pacing up and down inside the enclosure, while the wearied expeditionists slept tranquilly in the midst of all the perils of the Gran Chaco.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PUMA.

About the hour of midnight Louis Ledoux awoke with a sudden start, and sat bolt upright, broad awake in an instant. Why he did so he could hardly tell, for he had dreamed of nothing since he went to sleep. Only, there was the sense of some danger being near, he could not tell what.

When he looked around all was quiet. The full moon was up in the zenith, shining down on the little square of *carretas*, and on the recumbent figures of soldiers and peons, looking like heaps of old clothes, as they slept, muffled in their ponchos.

The boy listened intently, and heard a faint rustling in the grass that surrounded the wagons. He

lay down again, and watched the space under the wagon wheels.

It was a difficult task, for he lay in the full moonlight, and the wheels were in deep black shadow. Only at one part of the enclosure was there a patch of moonlight, just outside, and a reflection from the ground under a wagon.

Louis rolled his eyes slowly from place to place without seeing anything. Since he first moved, the rustling had been replaced by a dead silence. The boy felt convinced that something was the matter, but could not tell what. Louis had improved much in firmness of character since his coming to South America. A few months before he would have alarmed every one round him. Now he lay still, resolved to find out what was the matter before he awakened the weary travelers.

One thing that surprised him was, that the sentry was not visible. It was a question in Louis's mind, whether the man had not gone to sleep. The boy lay there, slowly turning his head from side to side, trying to peer under the wagon wheels, but nothing was to be seen.

Then, after the lapse of nearly ten minutes, during which he lay still, he heard the soft rustle again. This time there was no mistake. Something was outside the camp, in the cover.

Louis peered eagerly in the direction of the sound, and distinguished the fiery points of some wild creature's eyes, green and glaring. Then they moved, accompanied by the usual rustle, and he saw the body to which the eyes belonged glide across the strip of moonlight at the end of the wagons.

Louis was puzzled at the looks of the creature. Long, low, and gliding like a serpent, it yet preserved the outlines of a great cat, and its color was such as to render it almost invisible. Once or twice, when the strange beast stopped, the lad almost thought himself dreaming, for it seemed to sink into earth and disappear. Then an onward motion would recommence, and he would see that a black shadow was moving along. Three times did the strange beast crouch and disappear in crossing the little patch of moonlight. Then it glided into the shadow and vanished entirely.

Louis began to feel nervous. Captain Hernandez was sleeping close beside him, and the boy stretched out his hand and touched him. In a moment the captain had turned his head, as broad awake as Louis, and whispered:

"Well, what's the matter? Have you seen anything?"

It was evident that Captain Hernandez was an old soldier, who had been awakened for night surprises many a time. There was no yawning and stretching, no rubbing of eyes. He was ready for action in a minute.

Louis whispered back:

"There's some creature outside, and I think the guard's asleep."

The captain gave a little start.

"Asleep!" he muttered. "I'll sleep him! It's the middle watch. One of Don Luis's peons."

Then they both lay still, listening.

Presently Louis nudged the captain.

"There it is!" he whispered.

The officer turned his head, and beheld the same fiery eyes that the lad had seen. They were close to the wagon wheels now.

"A jaguar!" he muttered, and put his hand down for his rifle.

"No," whispered Louis. "I saw it in the moonlight; it has no spots; it's gray. You can hardly see it."

The captain made no answer. He was watching the eyes. Presently they disappeared. Then they heard the rustling again.

Very slowly and cautiously the officer drew up the rifle that lay by his side, and rolled over on his face. He and Louis were lying with their heads toward the strip of moonlight under the wheels. The faint rustling still continued, as if the animal was making a circuit of the camp, and at intervals there was a pause of silence. Whenever such a pause occurred, the fiery eyes became visible at some point of the circle. It became evident that the creature, whatever it might be, was reconnoitering at such times.

At last the rustling approached the strip of moonlight once more, and the captain whispered:

"Now we'll soon see."

Sure enough, a moment after, the same stealthy, catlike figure made his appearance, creeping rapidly forward a few paces, then halting. This time it was close to the wagon wheels.

"A puma," whispered the captain; "and a monster at that."

The ghost-like animal here paused, with its face toward the enclosure, and crouched close to the earth.

Immediately it became invisible.

Louis rubbed his eyes. A moment before he saw a gray cat prowling round the wagons. Then it had disappeared, as if the earth had swallowed it.

"Where has it gone?" he whispered to the captain.

"Nowhere," answered Hernandez, in the same tone. "You can't see it for the grass. That's all."

As he spoke, he pushed his rifle forward without noise, raised both elbows on the ground, and brought the butt of the piece to his shoulder.

In a moment later the ghost-like creature raised its head, and they saw once more the green, glaring eyes. Then it rose to its feet, and there, plain enough, was a huge, hungry-looking puma, as large as a jaguar, but of a color so indistinct, so like the gray background, that only the shadows rendered it visible.

It stood gazing at the wagons with a fierce but wistful look, slowly waving its tail back and forth.

For a moonlight shot nothing could be fairer. The

captain's rifle slowly came to a level. The creature's head was on a line with the interval between the two wagon wheels, and the space served as a guide.

One instant the barrel remained, steadily as a rack, and then there was a bright flash, a sharp report, and a white cloud of smoke, all in one.

Louis, who was watching the puma, saw it drop to the earth, and then kick and struggle violently, bounding up now and then like an India rubber ball, only to fall heavily down again. But he had not long to watch.

The shot at the puma seemed to be the signal for pandemonium to break loose. A moment later every man in camp was on his feet, shouting and excited.

Outside the corral there was a tremendous scuffling in the grass, as a number of dark figures dashed by, roaring and growling, all coming from the river. They seemed to be in a perfect nest of fierce beasts, the watering-place of all the jaguars in the Gran Chaco.

CHAPTER XIX.

MALMORA.

Two lads sat on a great slab of granite, talking together in low tones, while round them flourished all the luxuriance of South American vegetation, in the hot regions of the Northern Chaco. Both lads were scantily clothed in crimson cotton waist-cloths, the same as those worn by the Chaco Indians, but the light tint of their skins, though bronzed by the fierce sun, showed that they were of a different race.

The slab on which they sat was covered with strange hieroglyphics. On its face was carved the outline of a human figure, rudely drawn and grotesque in outline, but very smoothly finished. The lads sat on the ruins of a gigantic idol, in the midst of a court-yard, surrounded by an immense white building, long and low, the walls made of stones of enormous size, and all covered with a profusion of sculpture.

There seemed to be no roof to this building; at least, the walls were crowned with bushes and trees, some of them of a size that argued many long years of growth. The court-yard itself was a tangled jungle, with paths cleared, and the line of the white building disappeared here and there behind the trees.

The two lads, as you may suppose, were none other than "Plug" and "Pickle," and the ruined building was one of the ancient temples, built hundreds of years before the conquest of America, by that ancient race who possessed the continent for many ages.

Jack Curtis had improved greatly since his capture by the Indians. Four months of wilderness life, constantly riding wild horses, had hardened and strengthened his frame to a surprising degree. His eye was clear and brilliant, his look bold and animated, and his whole appearance was very different from that of the despondent captive of the Pampas.

Old "Plug" was the same as ever, short, stout, sturdy-looking, and brief of speech.

"I say, Plug," said Jack, "I'm beginning to like this sort of life. Gil Verde was right after all. I don't think I should try to escape, if they didn't guard me."

"Umph!" growled "Plug." "You may thank me for it then. If you hadn't done as I told you, you'd have been hoeing corn or tending cattle now."

Jack laughed.

"I own up, old fellow. I did feel awful mean on that three days' ride, and if you and I hadn't got up that tumbling entertainment for them, we might both have been put to work. How they did stare when I turned a back and a few hand springs. It's lucky I had practiced it so often in the gymnasium at Wobcon's. Well, well, who would have thought we should be so happy out here?"

Tom growled.

"I'm not happy, Pickle, and I won't be till I see poor little Inez out of their clutches. We're boys. They can't harm us. But old Nabadagna wants to marry her to Gil Verde, the Blackguard."

"That's true, Plug," said Curtis, thoughtfully. "We ought to get that poor girl out of the scrape. Didn't she tell you she had a lover somewhere in Buenos Ayres?"

"Yes," said "Plug." "A captain of dragoons called Hernandez. Some Spanish blower, I guess, who hasn't got grit enough to come after her. Pickle, if I was a man, and had a girl stolen that way, I'd never rest alive till I'd got her or got killed."

"Guess he'd do the last," said "Pickle," dryly. "Tisn't easy to catch a Chaco Indian napping."

"Bah!" said Holland, disdainfully. "They're only men, after all. They're easy enough on us. Why, here's old Nabadagna gone on a hunt, and there ain't a dozen warriors in town to guard the women. If you're game to try it, I'm going to cut and run before they come back."

"Wherever you go I'll follow," said Jack, firmly. "But what shall we do about getting little Inez away?"

"But her on a horse," said Tom, literally. "We haven't got a carriage, and if we had, we couldn't take it, for want of horses broken to harness."

"Now don't be an ass, Plug. I knew all that. What I mean is, can the little girl stand the fatigue of a few hundred miles on horseback? She is not used to it, as we are."

"Well," said "Plug," dryly. "You don't know what a girl will stand till she's tried it. She's a strong, hearty girl, and—"

"Hist!" said "Pickle," starting; "some one is coming. By Jove, if it ain't Malmora!"

Tom looked up as the tramp of a horse echoed

through the silent court, and beheld a mounted figure advancing toward them at a canter. In a moment more a girl on horseback dashed up to where they sat, and threw her horse on its haunches before them.

The figures of both horse and rider were singular and beautiful beyond the common. Nowhere but in the Chaco could such a sight have been seen. The girl herself resembled a beautiful bronze statue of Venus, so delicately beautiful was the outline of her dark figure. Her polished skin shone like bronze, and a heavy mass of silken black hair swept the croup of the horse behind her. This hair was simply drawn back from the forehead and confined by a gold ring at the back of the head into a single heavy tress, which flowed down her back, leaving her motions entirely free. Neck and arms were covered with jewels and bracelets of gold and emeralds, while several large diamonds gleamed in the circlet above her brow, which kept the confining ring in its place. But the radiance of her large, sparkling eyes outshone the diamonds, and her teeth were whiter than pearls as she smiled on Tom Bullard. Her dress, like that of all the Indian women, was a mere girdle, with a fringe of beads, some two feet in length, which fell like a skirt around her, parting on either side to expose her polished limbs. In this case the beads were of pure gold. The little feet of the young Amazon were protected by sandals of gold chain-work, and she carried in her hand two light javelins of cane, with bright steel heads.

The steed on which the Indian Amazon was mounted was one every way worthy to bear the burden, being a magnificent horse, as black as jet, with a skin that shone like satin, in the sun, a tail that swept the ground, and mane that fell to his knees! His small, pointed head was so delicate that he could have drank out of a two-quart measure, while his fiery eyes and blood-red nostril gave token of spirit, as his slender limbs did of speed.

The girl sat firmly as any warrior in the tribe, without saddle or bridle. Indeed, till one looked close, it seemed a mystery by what means she managed the horse. Then you could see a slender string, no thicker than whipcord, passing round the horse's under jaw, and going to the hand of the rider. Slender as it was, it shone in the sun, for it was made of strands of gold wire.

"Well, son of the stranger," said the wild princess, in the Indian tongue, which the boys understood pretty well by this time, "are you ready to go hunting with Malmora?"

It was Tom she addressed, on Tom that she smiled. She was the only remaining daughter of the old cacique, and it was understood in the tribe that on Nabidagua's return from the hunt in which he was then engaged, the ceremony was to take place which was to adopt Tom into the tribe and marry him to Malmora.

The girl herself seemed willing enough. The fact was, that she was somewhat smitten with this white stranger, so different from her own train of dusky adorers. The bold, frank ways of Tom had impressed her greatly, and she had heard of the ignominious defeat he had inflicted on Cabido, the bully of the tribe.

Still, it must be confessed that if Malmora had been left to herself, she would have chosen Jack Curtis. Jack was much taller than "Plug," nearly a man in stature; and his fair hair curled all over his head. In complexion and every thing else, he was a still more marked contrast to the straight-haired Indians than Tom, and all nature loves contrasts.

But Malmora was an obedient daughter, brought up in Indian habits of subjection to her father, though queen of all the rest of the tribe. As the cacique had announced to her her fate, she had accepted it philosophically, with a little sigh of regret for the fair-haired stranger, but content to take the other, if needs be.

To explain the pleasant terms on which Jack Curtis seemed to be with the tribe, which at first had looked on him with such contempt, it must be observed that Jack had taken Tom's advice, after a day of rest, to do something to "astonish the natives."

This something was easily found. Jack was a first-class gymnast, better even than his friend Tom, though somewhat lazy. A few of the common tumbling feats amazed the Indians, and when Jack threw a forward somersault over two horses, not a chief in the tribe but wanted to adopt him, for the Chaco Indians value nothing so much as physical prowess. Jack completed his victory by taking a stick and parrying all the assaults of a man on foot armed with a lance. On the firm ground he was a good fencer, as we have said, though on horseback he was nowhere as yet. Still he began to improve, by practicing with "Plug."

But it's just about time that Tom Bullard answered the beautiful princess, who had just asked him:

"Are you ready to go hunting?"

Tom looked up with a grin.

"I'm ready enough, but they won't let me go, Malmora."

CHAPTER XX.

THE ABIPONES' HOME.

The Princess Malmora laughed gayly.

"When my father is away," she said, "I am queen of the Abipones. Who shall gainsay it, if I say you may go? My father and the warriors are away hunting, and I have made up my mind to hunt, too. That pale girl will go with me."

"What pale girl?" asked Tom, starting.

"The girl they took when they stormed the carretas," said Malmora. "Coca wants to marry her, and she cries all the time. I'm sorry for her. I

would sooner she married Nagua, the second war chief. He is a man, and could make her happy, while Coca is a renegade. I hate him. He wanted to marry me once, but even my father could not make me do that."

Tom listened to every word. He knew that Coca was the name given to Gil Verde by the Indians, and that the pale girl could be none other than Inez Lozada.

"And why is she going with you?" he asked.

"Ah, that is a secret," said Malmora, slyly; "you shall know when we are out on the Chaco. There are too many ears in these walls."

And she waved her javelin in the air toward the ruins.

"My comrade, can he go?" asked Tom, pointing to Jack.

Malmora looked down at her little foot as if in some embarrassment. All her haughty grace deserted her in a moment.

"The Sun Child may come, if he wishes," she said, in a low tone.

Jack knew she meant him. His fair hair had earned him that title among the dusky Indians.

He was eager to answer:

"I will come, beautiful princess."

Malmora looked full in his face, smiled, and, dark as she was, blushed sensibly, the red blood rushing to cheek and brow.

Jack didn't understand the symptoms, but Tom was much more learned.

"She's spooney on you, Pickle," he muttered; "and if we play right, we'll be out of this hole tonight. Come on."

Jack was nowise loth. He followed Tom slowly, while the princess led the way out of the inclosure at a gallop, as if glad to escape from the eyes of the "Child of the Sun."

The two lads followed her out of the great court of the temple, for such had been the building which surrounded them. They passed out of a grand doorway, over whose top a huge block of granite, forty feet in length, had been raised many long years before, while the solemn figures of the old Peruvian idols frowned on each side from these sculptured door-posts.

"I wonder who made those old guys, Pickle?" said Tom, as they passed the gate.

Jack had read Prescott's Conquest of Peru, and answered readily.

"The old Peruvians, of course. They once owned all this country. The Spaniards never found this temple, or we shouldn't see so much gold and silver, you can bet."

As he spoke, they emerged from the ruined temple and saw before them the white walls, streets, and temples, of a great town. All was silent and desolate now, save for a few Abipone women strolling about the deserted streets, but it was evident to the boys that they saw the remains of what had once been a powerful and populous city.

Not far off was a great white temple, in better preservation than any ruins they had yet seen, for it retained its roof, made of huge slabs of stone, inclosing a long tunnel, of about thirty feet in width, and at least a hundred feet long.

As they passed the entrance, they could see two long avenues of colossal idols of white stone, partly covered with plates of gold, which glittered in the sunlight that came through numerous openings at the side. At the end of this corridor, a blaze of light indicated an opening, and a square open court could be seen, whose walls seemed to be covered with plates of gold.

"I wish we could go in there," said Jack, wistfully, as he looked into the temple. "I've half a mind to do it, since no one is looking."

"Don't be a fool," said Bullard, curtly. "That's the sacred temple of the Sun, Gil Verde tells me, and they'd cut us up into small pieces if we profaned it. Wait till you're adopted into the tribe before you try it. We couldn't carry off anything, if we wanted. They'd follow us to Buenos Ayres, but what they'd catch us."

Jack saw the force of his friend's words, and they strolled off down the broad street, bordered with temples and palaces, all in ruins, till they reached a broad square, similar to that in the ruined temple, but clear of vegetation, and surrounded with various buildings.

Scattered under the walls of these monuments of the past were rows of little booths and huts of green branches, fresh and pleasant-looking, where the forms of Abipone women and children could be seen moving about.

There were a few men clustered in a group around a fire, but three of them were old and decrepit, two were lads of sixteen, and only one was a warrior in the full sense of the word. He was a tall, powerfully-built man, with but one arm, the other being cut off above the elbow.

In short, it was clear that the warriors were all away, and Tom whispered to Curtis:

"To-day's our time, Pickle. We'll never get such a chance again."

"It's lucky for us Malmora asked us to go out," replied Jack. "We couldn't get clear, even of these fellows, so easily as you think."

The Princess Malmora was sitting on her black horse, near one of the little huts, talking to a girl whose white skin shone in brilliant contrast to the dusky Indians round her.

It was Inez Lozada, the captive of the carretas, metamorphosed into an Abipone girl, covered with glittering gold chains and ornaments, and wearing a crimson cotton skirt that fell to her ankles as her sole garment. The Indians always changed the dress of their prisoners at once, and the different civilized garments of poor Inez were parted among the Abipone women around.

As the boys looked, they saw Inez move away with the princess, in the direction of the horse-corral, which was nothing more than the square court of another of those ruined temples that made the Abipone stronghold.

The two lads followed the girls, sauntering slowly and carelessly past the group of men, and soon reached the gate of the corral. Tom looked back as he got there, and saw that the one-armed warrior had risen to his feet and was looking toward them.

"We're not going to get out so easily, Pickle," he muttered. "Old One-Arm is getting suspicious, I guess."

Jack looked carelessly round and stretched himself as if he was yawning.

"Don't look as if you minded him," he said, quietly. "Now my blood is up, I'm going to get off to-day. Come in."

He and Tom entered the lofty doorway and looked into the court of the temple. It was of much smaller size than the rest, with a narrow entrance and exit, and both were alike blockaded.

The princess and Inez were standing at one of the barriers, waiting for them to come. Tom threw down a couple of bars, and they all entered the inclosure. As they did so, Tom looked back. One-Arm was coming slowly toward the corral. He bore no weapon but his knife. Without noticing him, Tom put up the bars again, and turned his attention to the corral.

There were not many horses there, and most of those were old and broken down. About a dozen were lame, and only two were what might be called fine animals. One was a bay stallion, the other a white horse, speckled and spotted with bay and black in the most remarkable manner, like the skin of a tortoise-shell cat.

This creature, as well as the bay, belonged to the princess, or it would not have been left behind, for all the good horses in the tribe were out on the hunt, or raid, whichever it might turn out to be.

The only animal that bore comparison with Malmora's horses was a gaunt-looking brown horse, with a white stripe on his face, that Tom knew belonged to the one-armed warrior.

"See here, Pickle," he said, hurriedly; "if old One-Arm makes any muss, we'll have to fight our way out. Are you game to punch him?"

"You bet," said Jack, laconically. "But he won't make a row. The princess is supreme here, you know."

"I don't know that," returned Tom, doubtfully. "It's my notion we'll have to make a fight. That old plug of his can run like a streak of greased lightning, for all he's so bony. He must never get on him."

Further conversation was interrupted by the princess, who called out to them:

"Get yourselves horses, friends. The pale girl will ride Jaguar."

She indicated by a sign the spotted horse, which had come up to her, and was rubbing its nose against her hand.

Tom looked round, and there stood One-Arm by the gate of the corral, looking grimly in.

"What means this?" demanded the deep tones of the savage. "Has the Princess Malmora determined to set the white captives free, that she takes two of them to the horse-corral, single-handed?"

"Malmora would not fear to take three of their warriors," said the girl, proudly, "while she wields these javelins. I am going to hunt, and I want my slaves to carry my game."

"It is good," said the Indian, gravely. "One-Arm will go, too. It is not safe to trust prisoners too far."

As he spoke he vaulted over the bars and stood inside the corral.

"One-Arm is welcome," said the princess, courteously; "let him ride Jaguar for the pale girl."

One-Arm nodded his head and drew from around his waist a simple cord of twisted thongs, which served him for a bridle. In silence he bridled Jaguar, in silence he helped Inez to her place on the beautiful creature. The girl had not uttered a word since he entered the corral. She was pale and trembling, realizing that something was going on, but unable to assist.

Tom Bullard had taken one of the lame horses that seemed best able to travel, and Jack Curtis was already leading out the bay stallion, when One-Arm, having given his hand for Inez to spring from, went to the entrance of the corral, threw down all the bars, and uttered a low whistle.

The gaunt brown horse instantly galloped up to his master's side, and the maimed warrior, with a single bound, sprung on its back, and was transformed to a centaur. He used no bridle, nor seemed to need one, as he swept out of the gate like a whirlwind, the gaunt brown horse seeming to fly. One-Arm dashed up to the fire where the other men were sitting, spoke a few words, caught up a cane lance at least twenty feet in length, and came tearing back to the gate just as the princess and her party rode slowly out.

The party was sufficiently incongruous. The princess, Jack Curtis and Inez were all finely mounted. Inez rode well, for, like all South American women, she was used to the seat of a man on horseback. Tom Bullard brought up the rear on a horse which was lame in one hind-leg, galloping with a curious hobble, which yet allowed of considerable speed.

"Whew!" muttered old "Plug," as he noticed the wonderful speed of the gaunt brown horse and its one-armed rider; "if I'd thought you were coming, I'd have fixed you, old fellow. All the fat's in the fire, or I'm mistaken."

He said nothing to any one, however, and the

princess was equally reticent. Tom could not help thinking that she had some secret motive for this apparent caprice of hers. She had made no objection to One-Arm joining them, and the whole party galloped across the great square, down the broad, deserted streets of the ruined city, and in a few minutes found themselves in a gorge of the hills that opened into the valley, in which the home of the Abipones was situated. Before them and below them spread a delightful prospect, a country flat as a billiard-table, and broken up by belts of waving woods, emerald-green savannas, silver threads of river and rivulets, with five or six beautiful lakes glistening in the sun.

It was their second view of the Gran Chaco.

CHAPTER XXI.

ONE-ARM.

ONE-ARM checked his gaunt horse with a word, and gazed far and wide over the prospect. In one particular direction he looked with peculiar earnestness, and Tom Bullard's eyes, following his, beheld a sight that caused his heart to sink within his bosom.

It was nothing less than the band of Abipones, coming back from their hunt. They were still many miles off, but there was no mistaking those moving dots for anything but horsemen.

"We might as well go back," he muttered, in a low tone to Jack Curtis, who sat beside him; "here comes the whole tribe."

As Tom said this, he felt a hand laid on his arm, and, looking round, saw the Princess Malmora pointing to the south, in the open Chaco. Tom's eyes followed hers, and he witnessed another sight that raised his spirits as high as they had been low before.

The well-known white and black hide tilts of four or five carretas were to be seen, not three miles off, moving along the edge of a patch of wood, while a number of horsemen were clustered round them with gleaming arms.

"The son of the stranger sees his brethren," whispered Malmora; "does he wish to rejoin them?"

Tom looked at her in surprise.

"Of course I do," he said.

"And will he take the pale girl with him if I send him?" said she.

"Certainly," said Tom, wondering what was coming.

"Then take her away, and leave the Child of the Sun to Malmora," she whispered. "I brought you here on purpose. The Child of the Sun is mine. Take the pale girl and flee."

"But you forget. One-Arm's horse is swifter than mine," said Tom. "He will follow and spear me."

"Change horses with the Child of the Sun," she whispered. "Do it quick, before One-Arm turns."

Tom hesitated.

"But what will my companion do?" he asked.

"Fool," said Malmora, in a low, indignant voice; "think you I would let him come to harm? Quick, ere it is too late."

Tom hesitated no more. He rode up alongside of Curtis, and said, in a low tone:

"Change horses, Pickle. Now's your time."

On two barebacked horses the change was quickly effected, and just as it was over, One-Arm turned round and caught sight of the wagons.

The sight gave him a shock, for he uttered a startled shout, and instantly turned to view his companions.

At the same moment Tom Bullard seized the horse of Inez Lozada by the bridle, uttered a loud yell, and darted off full speed toward the distant wagons.

As he went, he drew his bowie-knife, and pricked both horses with its point to renewed exertions.

One-Arm couched his lance and went off full speed after them, the princess following, while Jack Curtis, wondering what all the noise was about, galloped after as fast as the lame horse could go.

The manner of their escape was still a mystery to him, but he comprehended that the nearer he got to the wagons the safer he should be. He was soon left far behind, but continued to urge his horse to its best speed.

Meantime it became a problem what was to become of Tom Bullard and Inez. Both were splendidly mounted, but the gaunt brown horse was showing an uncommon burst of speed, and already was slowly closing the gap that separated him from Tom's bay charger.

Tom was unarmed, save for the knife, and Jack felt there was but little hope, should One-Arm get up to him.

And the savage was fast closing up. It seemed wonderful that such an ill-looking horse should be able to do so much, but he actually was nearing the magnificent horses of the Princess Malmora. The only creature that seemed able to outstrip him was the black charger ridden by Malmora herself. That seemed fairly to fly, and came up with the gaunt brown, slowly but surely, till One-Arm and the princess were close together behind the fugitives.

By that time they had gone about a mile and a half, and left the hills, and were scouring across a level green savanna, in full sight of the carretas by the wood. As they came down, however, they lost sight of the distant moving dots that they took for returning raiders; and the only visible objects were those they took for friends.

Jack Curtis, using his best speed, was yet at least a quarter of a mile behind the rest, when he heard One-Arm give a yell, and saw him close to Tom Bullard.

Then the Western lad suddenly swerved from his course and darted off on a new track, while One-Arm shot by, missing the thrust of his lance. Jack laughed aloud for joy at his friend's escape, for he saw that the Abipone, being deprived of reins, could

not manage his horse with the same facility as Tom, and, especially in short turns, was thrown out.

But One-Arm, to his great surprise, did not follow after Tom. Instead of that he couched his lance anew, and prepared to slay the other fugitive, helpless Inez Lozada, who still fled straight forward.

In spite of the hopelessness of being heard, Jack uttered a shout of rage as the savage closed on the poor girl, but the next instant would have sealed her fate, had not she, too, involuntarily swerved to one side, and so eluded the thrust.

In a few moments One-Arm checked his horse, with some difficulty, swerved round and came tearing back after Inez, who had fled at right angles to her former course. This change of direction brought Jack once more close to the scene of conflict, and he was soon there.

The princess had pulled up, as the two fugitives separated, and now sat still in the middle of the field, watching the chase with seeming unconcern. One-Arm kept after Inez, and was nearing her a second time, when the girl gave a great scream and doubled back.

She was just in time, for the lance of the infuriated savage grazed her white arm in passing, and drew blood. The girl shrieked again, and darted toward the princess, as if seeking protection. She encountered old "Plug," who had wheeled, and was now coming tearing to meet One-Arm, with his little dirk-knife bare. As the lad shot past her, he screamed:

"To the carretas, senorita! You will be safe there. Quick!"

The next minute he came down to meet One-Arm, swerving to his own left as he did so, to get on the right of the Indian.

One-Arm ground his teeth, uttered a savage yell, and rushed his gaunt steed full at Tom. Almost as they were closing the lad swerved once more to the left, and the Indian missed his aim. He was much more wary, however, this time, wheeling in the new direction after Tom, as soon as the latter had eluded him.

Now the contest became close and exciting, all the while that the fugitive senorita was making the best of her way toward the distant carretas and horsemen. Jack came up with the two combatants as One-Arm chased Tom round and round, the lad always managing to escape by dodging and changing direction.

Then the boy longed for a weapon to help his friend, and there was none on the field except the two light javelins of the princess.

Suddenly flashed over his mind "Plug's" saying, "Lucky for us she's spooney on you, Pickle."

Without a moment's loss he galloped up to her and said:

"Malmora, see, my comrade is in danger. Help him, if you love me."

Malmora smiled joyously and tossed him one of the javelins.

"Child of the Sun, you are mine," was all she said.

Then she urged the black charger and shot away like an arrow to where Tom was hard bested by One-Arm.

The Western lad was turning and dodging, and trying every sort of artifice to elude the Indian's spear. He was not a fugitive any longer. On the contrary, whenever he could induce One-Arm to overshoot his mark, the active boy invariably turned after him, trying to gain his right rear, and get within guard of the long lance. But One-Arm was always round in time, quivering his keen point in such a manner that it was impossible to parry it.

Jack Curtis urged his old cripple, which was now so much warmed up to work, it hardly went lame at all. In a few moments he was close to the combatants, when One-Arm suddenly turned and charged him. Nothing daunted, "Pickle" poised his light javelin and sent it whizzing through the air just as One-Arm closed. He saw the point bury itself in the Indian's shoulder, and then he tumbled off his cripple on one side, just as the lance-point passed the horse's back on the other. He was unwounded, but he rolled over and over on the greensward as if he had been thrown from a sling. As he looked up, he heard a shrill cry of rage, and saw the princess cast her second javelin, which struck One-Arm full in the breast.

Then came a rush and a thump, as Tom Bullard closed in, stabbing the Abipone to the heart with his keen dirk-knife, throwing him off and leaping from the bay charger on the brown at the very moment of closing.

Tom knew what he was about. The brown horse had no bridle, and would have been off in another minute, whereas the bay, turned loose, trotted up to the princess with a glad whinny of recognition.

As soon as the lad could check the brown horse, he turned him by the force of his legs, as he had seen One-Arm do, galloped back to the body of the dead Indian, stooped from the horse, hancing to his mane, and picked up the lance lance in triumph.

"Get the javelins and mount, Pickle," he cried, as he passed Jack, who was scrambling up, half stunned. "Take the bay horse—he's tame—and don't give the girl her javelins if you value your liberty. She wants to run away with you."

Jack ran up to the body of One-Arm and plucked out both javelins, just as Malmora rode up, leading the bay horse.

"Quick, Child of the Sun," she cried. "Mount and fly with Malmora. You are mine now, for I have struck a man of my tribe to save you. Let us fly."

Jack leaped on the horse before he answered. Then he pointed to the carretas. Tom and Inez were already galloping toward them.

"Come then, princess," he said. "You shall be well treated among my people. See where they come."

As he spoke, a number of horsemen, glittering with burnished weapons, came galloping down toward them from the distant carretas. The princess straightened up haughtily on her charger.

"I am queen of the Abipones," she said. "You are mine and I am yours. Come with me. Let your comrade and the pale girl join their people. I never go among the Spaniards."

"Then I must go without you," said Jack, quietly. "I am much obliged to you for helping me to escape, but I want to go back to my friends."

Malmora uttered a scream of anger. Her beautiful face became as fierce as that of a tigress instantly.

"What!" she cried, "would you deceive me, wretch that you are? Give me my javelins."

"It wouldn't be safe," said Jack. "If you won't come, good-by."

He wheeled his horse and galloped off toward the carretas.

Malmora sat dumb for one instant. Then she too turned her horse and sped away, like an arrow from a bow. She took the direction in which they had first seen the returning Abipones.

CHAPTER XXII.

A NEST OF JAGUARS.

We must return to our friends, whom we left in camp on the Gran Chaco, when they were so suddenly disturbed by the shot of Captain Hernandez.

At the sound of that shot at least twenty huge jaguars bounded out of the cover, and stood roaring and growling outside the wagons, as if half-enraged, half-fearful of what was coming. Inside the corral, the cattle began to bellow and struggle, the horses reared and kicked, squealing viciously, the men shouted and talked together, and all order seemed to vanish.

The strangest thing was that the cattle had not scented the jaguars long before; but this was explained by the fact that the wind was blowing directly toward the river, and that the fierce beasts had come from that direction against its current.

Now that the oxen both saw and heard them, the uproar was terrific. Had it not been for the heavy carretas, which formed so strong an inclosure, a stampede of all the stock would have been inevitable. As it was, several horses broke loose and galloped wildly about, inside the inclosure, rending it so dangerous that every man in haste abandoned his blankets and climbed into the carretas to get out of the way.

Louis and the captain found themselves in one wagon, while the jaguars, who had at first seemed to be appalled by the racket, now, emboldened by impunity, and excited by the smell of the cattle, commenced an indiscriminate attack on the caravan.

They were very different creatures from the cowed jaguar of the pampas constantly hunted with fire-arms. The rattle of musketry did not seem to terrify them, although a withering volley was poured in at short range, stretching four or five on the earth at the first fire. The rest, stung to fury by their wounds, charged the carretas; and a terrible scene of confusion ensued.

The great beasts bounded up against the wagons, shaking them about, heavy as they were; and, tearing at the hide tilts with claws and teeth, tried to climb in. Several crept between the wheels and dashed among the cattle inside, where they soon produced an awful silence as they pulled down their victims. The cattle and horses, lately so obstreperous, cowered together in trembling silence once the brutes had struck down a prey or two, and the only noise was left in the wagons.

Here gauchos and soldiers were alike fighting bravely to keep off the enemy with their revolvers; and jaguar after jaguar only rent an opening in the carretas to find his head riddled with bullets.

It is hardly possible to tell exactly what happened in the few minutes of confusion that followed. Even the fierce jaguar has sufficient sense to recognize when he is overmatched. The rain of bullets was so incessant from the revolvers, the wounds of the animals so numerous, that first one and then the other turned and dragged itself off into the cover, howling with pain, while the soldiers, leaping out of the carretas, and by this time warmed with a frenzy of excitement, boldly attacked and exterminated the three or four bolder jaguars that had penetrated the inclosure to prey on the cattle.

Then at last they were able to take an account of casualties, and found that they had lost three oxen, one horse, while four men were more or less seriously wounded by the claws of the jaguars.

Eight of the fierce creatures lay dead outside the square, four more had been shot inside the inclosure, and the great puma that had caused all the disturbance lay in his tracks on the grass, shot through the brain, but still breathing, although quite senseless to all seeming. A second bullet, this time a shell, was sent into the heart of the puma, which then lay perfectly still, the last spark of life extinguished.

"It was lucky for us, Alonzo, that you fired when you did," observed Don Luis, as he looked round him at the remains of their late assailants. "We might have fared worse otherwise. These creatures display astonishing boldness, and it seems that we have camped in their very midst. If they had all got inside, as they well might have done, we should have suffered fearfully—lost all our stock at least. Who was on guard at the time? Why did he not give the alarm?"

"Nay, as to that," said the captain, "it was one of your own people, and the poor devil has paid dear

for going to sleep. He was one of the first wounded by the jaguars. I fancy it will be a lesson to the rest to keep awake on guard in future."

"It will indeed be a lesson to us all," said the estanciero. "After this we will put at least two men on each relief, and one will keep the other from going to sleep."

This was no sooner said than done. The refractory cattle and horses were, with some difficulty, reduced to silence, and the camp once more sunk into quiet for the night. There was a good deal of grumbling about ponchos and blankets, muddled and torn to pieces, but on the whole every one was well satisfied to have got off so cheaply. A good many of the gauchos, too much excited to sleep, made up the fires, and sat round them for the rest of the night, but the more philosophical soldiers wrapped themselves up in their ponchos, and snoozed peacefully till morning.

When day dawned, Louis Ledoux was up with the first, watching with much interest the process of skinning the jaguars and the puma. The latter proved to be indeed a monster, measuring nearly as much as a full grown lion. Indeed the gauchos called him a lion, and his color was nearly the same.

No further annoyance was experienced from the jaguars, though it turned out the woods were full of them. When the wagons drew up in the morning and moved down to the stream to water the cattle, the horsemen roused out numbers of the fierce brutes, who slunk away in the covers, as if afraid of daylight.

The immense abundance of peccaries, capinchas, and other game, swarming around the watering-place, accounted for the presence of the jaguars. They had entered one of nature's preserves, and the game was absolutely innumerable. Even the tapirs, usually shy, solitary animals, were seen in pairs and groups, sporting and swimming in the water, and the pampas deer were as thick as flies.

The little caravan crossed the stream and traversed an open green savanna for some hours, at the end of which they began to come in sight of a low, rolling chain of hills. Here one of the guides, who had been a prisoner to the Chaco Indians, told them that Huazarcas, the sacred town of the Abipones, was near them, and almost at the same time the moving figures of horsemen, faintly seen, made their appearance on the hills.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WILD RACE.

WHEN Jack Curtis galloped away toward the oncoming horsemen, he felt that they must be friends, though he could not tell who they were. He was very quickly alongside of Inez Lozada, who had slackened her pace and was riding at a slow canter, as if afraid to be left alone. Jack joined her to her great comfort, for Tom Bullard was already far ahead, on the gaunt brown horse, that seemed fairly to fly toward the strangers. Tom himself, with his long hair streaming back over his shoulders as he crouched over his horse's mane, Indian-fashion, shaking his lance, was no bad representative of a wild Abipone. Three months under the hot sun had tanned his skin to a hue almost as brown as an Indian's, though without the tinge of red that usually accompanies it. He went tearing along at a tremendous pace, for the gaunt horse, poor and ragged as he looked, seemed to be able to outrun anything on the pampa.

In a very few minutes the boy was almost up to the strangers, and then they saw him swerve off to the right, and sweep along the front of the line of horsemen, as if in doubt of their character.

Jack and his companion galloped steadily on, the young girl watching the strangers intently. Jack could see that most of them were soldiers, with bright, brazen cuirasses that glittered in the sun. They were galloping on in a little column, four abreast, led by a brilliant figure on a dapple-gray horse, while a large number of horsemen in common gaucho dress were scattered on either side of an irregular skirmish-line.

Suddenly Inez Lozada, who had hitherto been silent, uttered a scream of recognition and delight.

"It is Don Alonso!" she cried. "He has come to find me, as I said he would. Oh, señor, we are safe, we are safe!"

As if in answer to her words, the brilliant officer turned to his men, and at a quick signal they halted, while he himself dashed out at a tremendous rate of speed, came tearing up to them and threw his horse on its haunches close to Inez, with the loud exclamation:

"*Dios de mi Alma*, I have found her at last!"

It was indeed Captain Hernandez, and he had found his promised bride.

In a moment more a slight, boyish figure came up behind the officer, and Louis Ledoux cried out:

"Hurrah, Pickle, we've found you! Where's old Plug?"

"Where is he?"

Jack Curtis could hardly believe his eyes.

"Kitty, is that you really?" he asked; "out in the Chaco all alone among the soldiers! Why, how did you get there?"

"Don Luis and Wiseman are both here with the carretas," said Louis, hurriedly. "But where's Plug, where is he?"

"Why, didn't you know him?" asked Jack, surprised. "There he is now."

And, as he spoke, Tom came swooping down, full speed, looking more like an Abipone than ever, and shaking his lance with a yell, shot past like a streak of lightning.

A moment later he had turned, brought his horse to a standstill, and gayly shouted:

"Kitty Ledoux, ye little woodchuck, what in Old Ned brought you here? Where's Wiseman?"

"Oh, Plug, Plug, are you really safe?" cried poor

"Kitty," and then he broke down crying, he was so much overjoyed.

Meanwhile the captain and Inez Lozada were talking Spanish together at a great rate, so fast that the boys could hardly understand a word. Both had so much to ask and to tell, Inez was so much overcome as to be weeping, and the gallant-looking officer was obliged to support her.

Altogether, they were a happy little party, but "Plug" was the first to remember that all was not safe yet.

The horsemen had advanced at least a mile from the carretas, and the latter were drawn up in a square at the edge of the distant wood. Tom remembered the way in which Malmora had left them, and he also remembered that the main body of Abipones could not be far off. He rode up to the captain of dragoons and observed:

"Beg pardon, Cap, but I guess we'd better be moving. There's a big crowd of those brutes of Abipones heaving in sight, and we'll need all the men we've got to beat them off."

The handsome captain cast an amused glance over Tom's figure. To say truth, what with his long, unkempt hair, his brown naked body, and the long cane lance in his hand, to say nothing of his wild steed, the lad looked a queer specimen to advise an officer of dragoons.

"And who are you, my young friend?" he asked.

"Why, that's Plug," said Louis Ledoux, indignantly. "Haven't I told you all about him, fifty times, captain? That's old Plug, the best fellow you ever saw or heard of, and this is Pickle."

Captain Hernandez could hardly help laughing as he surveyed the two lads, but his politeness did not fail him. He had, indeed, heard all about the boys from Louis, who was his great favorite.

"I am really glad to meet you, señoritos," he said, smiling. "My little friend, Louis, has told me all about you, and I am rejoiced that you have escaped with Dona Inez."

Here he turned to the senorita and asked her something in his rapid Spanish, to which she replied in the most enthusiastic terms of praise. Then the officer extended his hand to each of the boys with great kindness.

"You are brave lads," he said, "and Dona Inez tells me that you have been all that heart could wish to aid her in her captivity. I thank you deeply, señoritos."

"Very good," said Tom, curtly. "Now, don't you think we'd better be moving? If you don't, look yonder."

He pointed off to the north. A number of horses were moving down toward them, at the distance of about a mile, but seemingly without riders.

"Why, that's only a herd of wild horses," said Louis Ledoux.

"It's a herd of wild savages, captain," said Tom, earnestly; "and they're guided by a woman who won't rest till she's had vengeance on us for fooling her."

And he gave the captain a brief account of Malmora's passion for Jack Curtis, and the way she had left them.

Hernandez became grave in a minute. He looked keenly at the body of disguised enemies approaching them. He knew well enough that each horse concealed and Indian behind him, hanging alongside and screened from view. The number of horses promised at least three hundred warriors, and he had only about sixty men, including the unreliable peons.

Moreover, part of the men had been left with the carretas under command of Don Luis and Manuel, and it behooved him to get back.

"Come, friends," he said, turning his horse; "it is time, truly, we were taking measures for our safety. Let us gallop on."

A few moments later they had rejoined the halted soldiers, and as the captain gave the word, the whole column changed direction and trotted off toward the wagons.

Tom Bullard hovered about the rear watching the supposed Indians. They were coming leisurely along, much in the manner and at the pace of so many wild horses, straying from side to side. The lad half expected to see them rise up and come racing down, when the column trotted off, but the mysterious body never altered their gait, but the soldiers slowly increased the gap between them as they went to the wagons.

In five minutes more Manuel Garcia came dashing out to meet his friends, and the reunion was peculiarly joyful. But there was not much time for congratulation. Tom Bullard squeezed Manuel's hand, uttered a few gruff words of welcome, and then darted out into the open fields, to watch the approaching horses. Don Luis came out a moment later, and held a short, hurried conversation with Captain Hernandez, which ended in dismounting all the horsemen, leading the horses inside the corral formed by the carretas, and so awaiting the attack of the supposed Indians.

But Tom Bullard would not come in. Confident in the wonderful speed of the brown horse, which obeyed his control as readily as it had that of One-Arm, he dashed off recklessly toward the herd of horses, as soon as his friends were safe in their fortress.

It was in vain that Don Luis and the rest called out to him to come back. Tom's wild blood was up, and the thoroughly Western spirit of reckless mischief was not to be checked.

As fearlessly as if the strangers had been really the wild horses they seemed, he galloped toward them, and swept boldly up within a hundred yards of their left flank.

As he had expected, the bravado roused them. He could see the naked bodies of the Abipones

hanging along by their horses' sides, clinging by arm and leg, and then, the moment they saw they were discovered, up leaped the whole crew, yelling like demons, and came tearing down after Tom with quivering lances.

Now indeed old "Plug" had need of all his address and courage. Swift as was the brown horse, the best riders and steeds of the wild Abipones were after him, and Tom saw behind him as he turned the snowy locks of old Nabadagua, the Apollo-like form of Nagua, the young war-chief, and last, but not least, the jewels and gold of the wild princess Malmora.

Away flew Tom into the open Chaco, followed by the whole pack, but speedily leaving the crowd behind. Before he had gone a mile the three that followed him first had drawn far ahead of all the rest, and the Princess Malmora on her wonderful black steed had actually lessened the hundred yards between her and Tom to fifteen. It was evident that the brown horse, good as he was, was no match for three of the Abipone steeds. Both Nagua and Nabadagua were also gaining, and not twenty yards separated them from each other and Malmora.

Tom looked back. He was safe from all the rest, and the people in the wagons were as yet unattacked. He had led the Indians away from their prey, and given his friends time to prepare for action.

Now, with a skill and boldness that came by second nature to this peculiar boy he determined to make his escape from the enemies that were pressing him so close.

He swerved boldly from his course and shot off in the direction of the wagons, uttering a yell to his gaunt steed that caused him fairly to fly. Both the princess and her immediate followers were equally quick to follow, and by cutting off a corner drew sensibly nearer.

Malmora was indeed now within a single horse-length, carrying a long cane lance for the first time since Tom had seen her. The point of the weapon, quivering in circles, was within two feet of Tom's back, and the lad saw that something must be done, or he would be wounded if not killed. There was no mistaking the fierce glare of vengeance in the eyes of the insulted Indian princess. She was bound to have some one's blood if she could.

But old "Plug," as we are aware, was no fool. He had made up his mind on his plan, and he proceeded to execute it with promptness.

Relaxing the pressure of his knees, he suddenly lifted his own spear horizontally with a jerk, striking up the point of Malmora's lance at the same time that his horse slackened speed.

The effect was instantaneous.

The black charger shot up alongside of the brown, Tom and the princess were almost touching each other, while each was inside the guard of the other's lance and harmless.

Then the lad dropped his lance, closed his horse in on Malmora by a pressure of the left leg, till the animal was crushing in the princess's foot, so as to impede her movements, while the horses rushed on side by side, faster than ever.

At the same moment he caught the girl round the waist with such a gripe that she screamed out and dropped her weapon.

That was just what Tom wanted. His knuckles went in under the fifth rib in that peculiar dig which renders people quite powerless, and it had full effect on Malmora.

She lost all control of her motions, and a moment later Tom rolled her off the horse, changed steeds in full career, and darted away with a triumphant shout, leaving the two chiefs behind him.

"I guess I've got you now," muttered Tom, as he looked back. "There's no mistake about this horse being the best in the tribe."

Indeed it seemed as if those behind knew it, for they gave up the chase the instant Tom unhorsed Malmora and took the black charger. As he looked back, he saw Nagua chasing the brown horse, while Malmora had risen from the grass and was gesticulating angrily to her father. Tom did not wait to see the upshot of their encounter. He was off like a flash to the carretas, and galloped in at the narrow entrance, crying:

"Lend me a revolver, some of you fellows, and I'll show you some fun, that's what's the matter!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ROPE BARRIER.

THE BUENOS-AYRENS were in a formidable position, and sufficiently well armed to make a good defense. The carretas in which they had traveled, six in number, were drawn up in a square, in such a manner as to protect all the cattle and horses, which stood crowded together within the inclosure. Soldiers and gauchos, rifle in hand, were put in parties of six in each wagon, the edges of the tilts being looped up to afford them a fair view. The rest of the guards were on the ground, between the wagon wheels, or clustered around the narrow entrance that was left.

When "Plug" dashed out once more, on his swift black steed, with a navy revolver in his hand, the great crowd of Indians were hovering at a distance, as if uncertain what to do. As the boy left the inclosure, their hesitation gave way to ferocity. Uttering a general yell, and headed by Nabadagua, the whole body came down at tremendous speed, shaking their lances, and coming straight for the entrance to the wagons.

The voice of Captain Hernandez was heard shouting:

"Not a shot till I fire! Take careful aim at the horses' heads."

Then there was a dead silence in the carretas, even the animals seeming to be cowed into stillness, as they heard the rush of hoofs and the awful yell of the incensed savages.

Tom Bullard was seen to sweep fearlessly across the front of the advancing charge, and fire every shot of his revolver into the mass, at short range. It was impossible to tell if any one fell, for the dust and confusion, but Tom wheeled about and galloped past the carretas in triumph, throwing the empty pistol in as he passed.

Then, with a rush, the Abipones, were on them. Almost at the instant Tom Bullard swept past, Captain Hernandez, who sat on his horse in the midst of the narrow entrance, fired his revolver at Nagua, the handsome war-chief, a signal that was followed by a rattling volley from the side of the carretas.

With a fiercer yell than ever, the Indians swept on and charged home. Old Nabidagua drove his long lance through the tilt of a carreta, just missing a gaucho behind it, but pinning the man's hat to the opposite side. Not an Indian flinched, though the volley told well, and the carreta tilts were riddled with spears. The men between the wheels were routed out in less time than it takes to tell, and the long lances drank blood again and again.

But the fire of breech-loading rifles and revolvers at a few feet distant soon proved too much, even for the daring Indians. After at least twenty of their number had been shot down, the whole band broke away as swiftly as they came, and disappeared in a cloud of dust.

During the attack Captain Hernandez sat on his horse by the entrance to the inclosure, a revolver in each hand, and such was the unerring accuracy of his aim, that not an Indian reached him alive. Five in succession charged him, and each met a bullet in full career. Old Nabidagua alone eluded him by dropping over the side of his horse as Hernandez fired, but the old chief was too wary to rise and tempt a second shot.

As soon as ever the Indians had withdrawn, Tom Bullard came tearing up from the wood in which he had been hiding. He found the ground strewn with dead bodies, both of men and horses. Three gauchos and as many soldiers were gasping in the agonies of death on the ground, the victims of the first charge of the terrible Chaco lancers.

"Give me another revolver, fellows," shouted Tom. "Come on, Cap. Your horse looks as if he could run a streak. Let's give 'em fits."

But the captain would not allow it. "No, no, senorito, you are brave and skillful, I admit, but we're not over our danger yet. Load up your arms, men, and you, senorito, come inside."

He spoke with an air of authority, like one accustomed to be obeyed, and Tom insensibly yielded to the tone and rode in.

He found Don Luis and Manuel looking out of the carretas while giving orders. Jack Curtis had received the graze of a random lance which had gone through the fleshy part of his arm, and Dona Inez was binding it up for him.

Tom was warmly greeted by Don Luis, who then advanced to Hernandez and discussed the probabilities of another attack.

"They're forming for one," said the captain, quietly. "This time they'll be fiercer than ever, but if we beat them off they'll leave us alone."

"The men must all come inside the corral," observed Don Luis. "Those long lances are not to be despised. I never saw men charge home in such a reckless manner. We must fire from the inside of the line of wheels. We may be outside the reach of their weapons then."

The captain nodded, and fixed his eyes on the distant cloud of dust, that showed where the Indians were galloping wildly up and down, reforming their ranks.

Don Luis busied himself in calling the men out of the carretas, and forming them in a dense line inside the corral, so as to fire through the wheels between the spokes, and still be out of reach of lances.

Then the captain gave some hurried orders to his own men, and the old Pamunyan sergeant, with three more men, ran out of the entrance carrying two or three lassoes, which they hurriedly knotted together as they ran.

Luis and the boys were watching the proceedings, unable to understand them at first, and the Indians were just beginning to move.

They caught a glimpse of a cloud of dust, full of gleaming lances, and then they saw Sergeant Gonzalez and his men draw their heavy sabers, stick the points into the earth, and throw their whole weight on them to drive them deep in.

That was the last that was noticed of them, for the Indians gave a tremendous yell just at that moment, and came tearing in faster than ever.

Still Sergeant Gonzalez and his men remained outside doing something with the sabers and lassoes, and it was not till the Indians were almost on them that they ran in.

Then came a second charge, as fierce and resolute as the first, but not so fortunate. Just as the line of horses came to the place where the soldiers had been busy, there was a tremendous confusion, horses and riders came down together, and rolled headlong on the earth, and the whole body swayed and halted.

A rattling volley pealed from the carretas, at the end of which the captain's voice was heard, crying: "Out, soldiers; charge them with the pistol! we have them!"

The next moment out ran all the soldiers, revolver in hand, led by the captain, and ran toward the scene of confusion, which was only some thirty feet from the wagons, but where the Indians seemed to

be stayed as if by a magic spell, for not one came nearer.

It was easily explained, after all. Sergeant Gonzalez and his men, having driven in their sabers, had stretched a lasso from hilt to hilt about eight inches from the ground. Every horse had tripped and fallen over it.

It was strange to notice the different demeanor of the Abipones on foot, when the soldiers attacked them dismounted, with the same men on horseback charging down. They seemed different men, so cowed and fearful were their looks as the pistol bullets rattled among their naked bodies. They turned and fled with hardly a shadow of resistance, leaving several dead on the ground, while the few who were mounted came charging down as boldly as ever up to the fatal line of the lasso.

There again another phenomenon was observed. These wild horsemen, perfect Centaurs as they were, seemed unable to clear this trifling obstacle. The least leap in the world would have done it, and yet they all recoiled from the rope, hesitated, broke, and finally fled in utter confusion.

"Safe for one day," said the captain, as he watched them. "Don Luis, we may safely go into camp behind a rope barrier. They won't attack us till we move out."

CHAPTER XXV. A DESPERATE RESOLVE.

THE great flaming ball of the sun sunk to rest behind the wild plains and scattered forests of the Gran Chaco, and illuminated with its rays the rival camps of savage and civilized men.

The carretas were no longer drawn up in a square. They were ranged in two columns, with horses and cattle standing at picket-ropes on each side so as to afford ample room, for each while bundles of cut grass in front of the animals prevented them from straying into danger.

At a distance of fifty feet from the animals stretched a low fence of stakes and ropes, slight in appearance, but in reality as strong as was necessary. The stakes had been cut in haste in the neighboring wood, up to which the rope barrier extended, and the trunks of the trees effectually protected one side of the camp.

Within that slender barrier they had found themselves, from experience, perfectly safe, their enemies being equestrian Indians, who never dismount. The wood was perfectly free to those on foot, for the thickets rendered it impassable for horsemen except at a walk.

The Abipones, so formidable and reckless in a charge, were totally unprovided with missile weapons, saving and except the bolas, which was useless in a wood.

Under the orders of Captain Hernandez, who seemed to be experienced in Indian warfare, the stakes had been driven and the ropes stretched, in spite of the attacks of the Indians. The working parties, having the shelter of the woods to retreat to, kept on at their work till their enemies were close by, when a volley from the woods drove off their assailants.

The new inclosure once made, the camp was moved into it, with ample room; fires were lighted, and the adventurers prepared to encounter a siege.

"These Chaco Indians are obstinate fellows," observed the captain, as he stood by the fire, puffing a cigarette; "but I think I know a trick that will be too much for them, in the end."

Don Luis was inspecting the distant warriors through a glass, and he put it down with a grave face.

"They have not done with us yet, Alonzo," he answered. "They are lighting three fires in a line. You know what that means."

The captain started slightly and looked at the Indians. Just out of gunshot the savages had gone into camp, to all seeming, and three distinct columns of smoke, black and heavy, as if fed with damp fuel, were slowly rising into the air against the glowing sunset sky.

Our four boys were gathered around a fire near their elders, and a fifth lad, of apparently the same age as Louis Ledoux, dressed in the picturesque pampas dress that all wore, was looking earnestly at Don Luis, as he spoke.

The fifth lad, however, was of such singular beauty of face, and sported jet-black curls of such wonderful length and luster, that it was easy to see that a girl, perhaps a woman, was there, in the boy's disguise.

It was none other than Dona Inez Lozada, who had been compelled to adopt this dress from the simple fact that the whole caravan contained not a shred of female attire; and the scanty garments of the Chaco became out of place in the midst of clothed and civilized men.

"What is the matter, Alonzo?" asked the girl, anxiously, as the captain watched the distant smoke.

"What does that mean? Is there more danger at hand yet?"

"I fear there is," said Hernandez, gravely. "Would we were safe out of this infernal place."

Yonder is a signal that will gather other tribes within twenty-four hours, and they will harass every step of our way home, if indeed we ever get there."

"But can we not beat them off?" asked Manuel Garcia, who had been listening attentively. "After all our losses, remember we count forty-seven rifles still, besides the revolvers of your men."

"Ay, but we shall have to fight ten, perhaps twenty times our number, if we stay here," said the captain.

"What of that?" said Don Luis, cheerfully. "Their numbers are only in the way, as long as we stay here. Their horses can never enter yonder wood, and we may defy the whole Chaco there."

"Ay, but how long must we stay there?" asked Hernandez. "Remember that these Indians have never yet allowed a hostile expedition to enter the Gran Chaco, and return in safety. Here we are likely to stay till we are starved out, when once the Tovas and Marimones come to help the Abipones."

"But can we not weary them out?" asked Manuel. "There is plenty of game in that wood which stretches for several miles. We can live as long as they can."

The captain shook his head. "Senorito," he said, "forty or fifty mouths eat up a great deal of game, and our friends outside will soon find means to drive off the rest. You must remember that there are plenty of tribes not far off, who are used to the woods, and will bring bows and arrows with them. No, if we stay here our fate is only a question of time."

"What do you advise, then?" asked Don Luis. "I know you too well not to be certain that you have a scheme for our deliverance."

"I have," said the captain. "It is our only chance, and I am free to confess a desperate one, at that. I will tell you what it is presently. First, I must visit my men, and find from the old captives whereabouts we are. Then I shall know my course."

He moved away, as he spoke, toward the groups of soldiers clustered round the fire, drinking their *mate*, and chatting together as carelessly as if no enemy had been near them, while the boys at the fire overwhelmed Don Luis with questions.

Tom Bullard was the only one of the party who was silent. With the dress of a civilized being, Tom had resumed all his old gruff, quiet ways, much lost in thought and speaking but seldom. His intercourse with the silent, stoical Indians had rather strengthened his habit in this respect.

He listened to the inquisitive Louis, who wanted to know every thing, to Manuel, who asked less but offered more advice, and finally to Jack Curtis, whose fighting-blood was up, and who wanted to defend the camp at all hazards.

Don Luis, at last, when he had heard every one with a smile, turned to Tom, and said:

"Well, Master Bullard, and what's your opinion? I suppose it's worth as much as the rest here. What do you think we'd better do?"

"Pull up stakes and mizzle," said Tom, curtly.

Then he poured himself out a cup of coffee, which he had been watching all the time as it boiled on the fire, and said no more.

Don Luis was a little puzzled. He had been so long among the Spaniards that he had almost forgotten his English slang.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Vainose the ranch. That's Spanish."

And Tom grinned as he sipped his coffee.

At this moment Captain Hernandez came back to the fire.

"It is as I suspected, Luis," he said, in a low tone. "We have been skirting the Vermejo, and though we are seventy miles from its mouth we are not ten from the Pilcomayo, which lies to the east of us."

"And what of all that?" asked Don Luis.

"Simply this: we must get there to-night."

"But how? We shall be attacked on the way."

"Not necessarily."

"How will you avoid it?"

"By keeping up the fires and stealing off."

"But the noise of the wagons will betray us."

"Not if we do not take them."

"What? Do you propose to abandon the carretas?"

"It is our only chance. It is already dark. You see those three fires that the Abipones have lighted? Well, they will be the means of bringing down hosts of enemies before to-morrow noon. As we are, we are compelled to remain in camp if we hope to defend ourselves. Once let us start, and all our fire-arms will not protect us from the rush of these savages. Let us give them their due, Luis. They are as brave as lions. With a naked breast and a cane lance they laugh at our fire-arms. There is no chance of escape for us here."

"But how will we be better off if we leave the wagons? They would ride over us in a moment."

"They must not see us."

"Well, then, how shall we prevent it?"

"Listen, and I will tell you."

Don Luis settled himself in an attitude of attention, while all the boys and the disguised Dona Inez clustered round the handsome captain.

The shades of night had already fallen over the scene, the brief twilight was gone, and the stars were shining down on green savanna and dark forest, while the chorus of innumerable insects had already begun in the forest. The fires gleamed red and bright, shining on the hide tilts of the wagons, on the tethered lines of cattle and horses, on the bright uniforms of the soldiers and gauchos. In the dim distance could be seen the flames of the Abipone Indians' fires, and the dark forms of the savages, sitting to and fro across the blaze.

"See," said the captain. "Our enemies think they have us safe, and they do not even take the precaution of setting a watch, for they know their friends are coming to their help. Well, then, let us kindle up all our fires, take a good supper, feed the horses well, and then, leaving the wagons and some of the cattle as blinds, steal off with the horses about midnight and we shall be on the banks of the Pilcomayo before morning."

"But how shall we be any better off there?" asked Don Luis.

"We shall, in the first place, have a method of retreat, by water, if the worst comes to the worst. We can build a raft, or, if necessary, canoes."

"But suppose we are attacked before we have time to build them?"

"Then we shall be no worse off than now. The

banks of the Pilcomayo are covered with forests; and we can stop all the cavalry of the Chaco, by cutting down a few trees. There we shall have a chance with our fire-arms, and the river is behind us for a last resort."

"But, suppose the Indians discover our intention and follow us? They may catch us in the open pampa, and annihilate us."

"We must trust to luck for that. If we get a good start, we may outrun them to the river."

"But how are we to know what pace to take in the dark?"

"That's the only difficulty. One of our best mounted men must stay behind to warn us by a signal, whenever the enemy discover our absence. Then he will have to ride for his life."

"Ay, that is easily said, but who will undertake such a risk?"

"I will," said Tom Bullard, speaking for the first time. "Give me a revolver and a rocket and I'll stay behind all night. They can't catch my black."

The rest all looked in great surprise at the lad, as he uttered these words. The service was one of such danger that it was expected that one of the dragoons, used to death and peril, would undertake it, but when "Plug" made the offer, no one interfered.

"My lad," said the captain, "do you know that the man who stays behind will probably be chased ten miles in broad daylight by merciless devils who will spit him like a lark if they catch him?"

"Ay, ay, boss," said "Plug," coolly. "I know it. Let's see them catch me, that's all."

Captain Hernandez looked keenly at the square, saturnine face of the boy before he answered. He had seen him that day for the first time, and remembered his reckless behavior before the Indians.

"You will do," he said, at last. "I accept your offer."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BRONZE PRINCESS.

THE profound stillness of midnight, only broken by the monotonous chorus of insects that sung the livelong night through, had settled over the two camps. The Abipones lay on the open pampa beside their horses, or around the smoldering embers of their dying fires, without even a sentinel on guard.

There was no moon that night, or at least it did not rise till toward morning; and the light of the stars was veiled with a thin curtain of mist.

The camp of the Buena-Ayrens was to all appearance as calm as the other. The fires were burning low, and the cattle were lazily chewing the cud beside their wagons, while the prostrate figures wrapped in ponchos that lay near the still flaming brands were still as the grave. Only a single figure was sitting up, and occasionally moving from fire to fire to cast on a few brands.

This figure was to all appearance that of an Indian, dark, bronzed, and almost naked, although a close examination of his person would have revealed the fact that he wore a pair of revolvers, one on each hip, in black holsters.

Such as it was, this figure was none other than that of our old friend "Plug," who had voluntarily renounced his clothes once more, to personate an Indian better.

Presently the lad stopped and listened intently. Then he stole off to the nearest wagon and threw himself on the ground to listen with greater readiness.

He fancied that he heard a rustling in the grass, and he was not mistaken. Ere long he not only heard it again, but distinguished the outline of an Indian's form, creeping toward the wagons.

Tom softly pulled out a revolver and watched patiently, as the stranger slowly crept up, and ere long was under the rope that encircled the encampment.

A moment later, and the watcher saw the intruder creep through, and raise its head to look around.

All was still as death. The recumbent figures never moved, and the Indian slowly rose up, revealing the jeweled coronet and flashing eyes of the princess Malmora!

Yes, it was Malmora herself, beautiful as ever, glittering with gold, as she stole past the fires, and came straight toward the place where Tom lay, as silently as a spirit.

In a moment the lad understood her object. The black steed, that he had captured so cleverly that very day, stood close beside him, fastened to one of the wagon wheels. It was evident that the princess had come to regain her horse.

Tom quietly replaced his pistol and rose to his feet, keeping behind the horse, and close to the animal's forelegs, so as to blend his body with that of the horse. Then he peeped round under the mane, and saw Malmora coming; and at the same instant, the horse, scenting his mistress, began to neigh a welcome to her.

The girl stopped, irresolute, and glanced around her, as if fearful that the sleepers would waken. Then she came forward with a swift, noiseless run, as if resolved to escape at any hazard, and in a moment was beside the horse.

Already her hand was on the bridle, when Tom suddenly dived under the horse, caught the girl round the waist, and threw her to the earth, when he said in low tones:

"Stir a limb and I'll shoot you."

Malmora was so utterly taken by surprise that she did not even scream. She lay trembling and looking pleadingly up at Tom, who had a revolver in his hand, and whom she instantly recognized.

Now, of course Tom never meant to shoot Malmora. He felt quite ashamed of himself for even frightening her, but he knew that it was a matter

of life and death to give his friends time to escape. They had been gone barely an hour, and if Malmora gave the alarm the Indians might yet overtake them in the pampa. The success of the dummy figures to represent sleepers told him that the disguise was likely to prove efficacious.

"What do you want here, Malmora?" he asked, sternly.

Malmora looked fearfully up. She was quite cowed.

"Pardon me, son of the stranger. I wanted my horse."

Tom smiled.

"You can't have him yet. I left One-Arm's horse for you. I want this one till I leave the Chaco."

Malmora trembled violently.

"And are you going to kill me?"

"Perhaps," said Tom, mysteriously. "It depends on yourself. Will you swear by the Great Spirit, if I let you rise, that you will be silent? If you give any alarm I will kill you instantly."

"I swear," said Malmora, with eagerness. "I will not say a word but what you bid me."

"Then rise," said Tom, gruffly.

He was so cautious and distrustful however to be off his guard. As the girl rose he wreathed his left hand into the long mass of hair that fell down her back, so as to prevent her escaping, while not impeding her movements or hurting her. He kept a cocked revolver in his right hand, ready to use at the first sign of treason; and thus he walked Malmora in between the wagons to where she could no longer see the camp of her friends.

Now that the girl was out of immediate danger, she seemed to be entirely at her ease, for one who was a prisoner. As she passed one of the recumbent figures, she gave it a push with her foot, and it required no more to give her a full clew to the mystery.

As she sat down by the little fire between the wagons, she turned a glance of admiration on Tom, saying:

"The white stranger is but a boy, but he is a great warrior. What will he be when his head is gray?"

"I'm sure I don't know," said Tom, smiling.

"What makes you say that?"

"You have deceived the Abipones, and your friends are gone," said she.

Tom started.

"How do you know? Don't you see them asleep?"

"I see logs and stones," said Malmora, gravely.

"The poncho does not always cover a man's heart. The Child of the Sun, the pale girl, and all the strangers have fled in the night. They are fools. They cannot escape the vengeance of the Children of the Chaco."

Tom smiled. He thought differently.

"Your tribe cannot hurt us," he said. "They tried to-day, and see the bodies of your warriors drying on the pampa."

"That was behind your fortress," said the princess. "They have left it, and where can they flee that we cannot follow? The Children of the Chaco are swift as the condors of the mountain, and see far."

"How can the strangers escape?"

"And do you mean to say that you would help them to slay the Child of the Sun?" asked Tom, remembering the girl's infatuation for Curtis.

Malmora frowned, and grated her white teeth.

"The yellow hair, is a cowardly capincha," she said, savagely. "I will drink his heart's blood when I catch him. My father will burn him at a slow fire for deceiving me. You are a man in *deeds*, and Malmora is sorry that she ever listened to the lying words of the Child of the—bah—the yellow-haired capincha."

Tom whistled.

"Here's a change," he muttered.

Then turning to Malmora, he asked:

"And would your father really forgive me, who have slain so many of his best warriors?"

Malmora smiled bewitchingly.

"We have both forgiven you," she said. "He longs to have you in the tribe. If you are such a brave foe, you would be a brave friend. Come back with me, and you shall be king of the plains, and I will be queen. We will slay your cowardly friends, take their fire weapons, call all the tribes together, and drive every stranger into the sea."

"Very nice," said Tom, sarcastically. "Tell me, what would you say to a man of your tribe who should come over to us and lead a band into your secret haunts when you were asleep?"

"We have no traitors," said the girl, proudly.

"No man that ever came to us deserted us."

"And yet you want me to desert my friends," said Tom. "No, no, Malmora, it won't do. If you love me as you say, you must leave your people and come with me."

"That can never be," said Malmora, firmly.

"I know it," said Tom, kindly. "Very well then, let us part friends. If you will promise not to give the alarm till I have departed as long a distance as the breadth of your town, I will leave you now. Your horse you cannot have till my friends are safe. Then I will turn it loose on the Chaco, and you can have it back."

Malmora shook her head sadly.

"It is too late," she said. "I came alone; but as soon as I am missed others will follow me. Perhaps even now they are in your camp. You have no choice but to stay with us."

Considerably startled, Tom sprang to his feet. Had Malmora been a man, he would have shot her down in his anger.

As it was, he ran out between the wagons, threw himself on the black steed and picked up the bridle, only just in time to escape death or capture. Even as he did so, the bulky form of Gil Verde, followed by a dozen warriors, rose up from the grass; and

old Nabadagua leaped over the rope from the outside, swinging his bolas.

Tom's revolver was out; and before he started he emptied six chambers in the very faces of Gil Verde and his friends. He saw the renegade drop, and Nabadagua staggered and let fall the bolas. Then, with a yell, away went Tom through a glade in the woods at the full speed of the black horse.

One instant he was surrounded with foes; the next, he was alone in the woods. He heard yells behind him, but he knew the Chaco Indians too well to fear them on foot.

The wood was at least two miles in breadth, and would have proved a puzzler to him, but for the fact that friends had been through already. The glade was thickly marked with hoof-tracks, and his horse seemed to be able to follow them, even in the darkness.

It seemed less than five minutes before he saw the forest open, while the faint glow of the rising moon shone through a gap in the trees ahead.

Then he felt the firm savanna under his feet, the moon rose up and showed a broad, distinct trail before him, and he found himself on the road to the Pilcomayo, going at a stretching gallop.

For at least an hour the pace was kept up, the moon rising higher and higher every moment. Tom began to wonder if his friends had yet reached the river, as there was plenty of time for them to do, when he heard the dull thud of hoofs in rapid pursuit, a long way off.

"Catch me if you can," muttered the boy, as he urged his horse to full speed, and had the satisfaction of hearing the sound grow fainter.

A quarter of an hour later, a black bank of forest stretched itself across the horizon, and Tom knew that the river was reached.

Then he paused a moment in some doubt.

It did not last long. The thunder of hoofs behind came plainly to his ears, borne on the night breeze, and, as he looked back, a bright red glow in the western sky showed where the wagons were enveloped in a grand bonfire by the exasperated Abipones. Tom knew that it would never do for him to be taken now. Even old Nabadagua would hardly forgive him.

But where were his friends?

He scanned the belt of forest with great eagerness, but all was dark and silent. He looked for the tracks, and found that, in his ride, he had insensibly diverged from them till they were lost.

Now the situation was indeed growing serious. Could he tell for certain to which side the track lay? His friends were hiding away. Had they seen him, and if so, could he find them?

In this emergency Tom hesitated only a moment. Then he pressed his horse with his heels and flew toward the wood.

In a trice he was under the shade of a forest of palm trees, and riding full speed through its arches. Then the moonbeams flashed up into his face all of a sudden, reflected from the surface of rippling water, and he knew he had reached the Pilcomayo.

The black steed thrust his head into the water up to the eyes, and drank deep draughts of the cool stream, standing midleg in the water. Tom sat still on his back, listening intently, but he could hear nothing of his friends. He thought over what he should do, while the horse was still drinking, and finally came to a bold conclusion.

Drawing his empty revolver, he proceeded to charge it with great deliberation. He knew that his pursuers could not have seen him since he had entered the shadow of the wood, and judged that they would probably stick to the trail he had missed. One captive was nothing to the chance of forty.

Whichever way his friends were, it was necessary to signal his presence. As soon as he had reloaded his revolver he rode out of the water to the edge of the wood. The Indians were almost in sight in the moonlight, and plainly in hearing.

Bang! went his revolver, as he fired it toward them at a lofty angle.

He didn't hope to hit any one, but it went against his principles to fire at random.

The flash was answered some distance down the river, and Tom turned back into the cover at once.

He knew all he wanted.

Replacing his revolver in the holster, he rode his horse straight into the water, and a moment later was swimming rapidly down-stream.

The current was so swift that he had not the slightest difficulty in proceeding. His horse swam nobly, aided by the stream, and they passed by the banks at the rate of six or seven miles an hour.

He heard the savages yelling furiously above him, and from the direction of the sound he judged that he was leaving them fast. As he had hoped, they were going straight toward the place he had just left.

Tom couldn't help laughing as he went, to think how nicely he had fooled them; and he swam boldly on, keeping near the middle of the stream in the strength of the current.

Almost before he realized it, he heard voices at a bend of the river below him, and changing his course, the swift current landed him just at the foot of a sloping bank, at the top of which stood a sentry, who shouted:

"Halt, or I fire! Who are you?"

"A friend," cried Tom, gayly; "and a wet one, too, master soldier. Are they all here, for the enemy will be on you in five minutes."

"*Si, senorita!*" said the soldier, joyfully. "You are a brave lad, for we all thought you were gone. The devils yelled so when you fired that shot, that we thought they had you."

Tom laughed as he came up the bank.

"They will take a good many steps before that

amigo!

"Who's that?" cried the voice of Captain Hernandez, at this juncture. "Who are you talking to, sentry?"

"The senorito, come back," answered the soldier, promptly.

Then there was a rushing through the bushes; and Captain Hernandez, Louis Ledoux, and all the rest, crowded round Tom, hugging and praising him.

"My brave lad," said the captain, half choked with emotion, "you are the bravest, noblest fellow I ever saw! Thank God you are safe! *Ay de mi!* when I saw the frelight, and heard the horse-hoofs of the Indians, I thought surely you were gone, till I heard your pistol and saw the flash. But come up here now, and see if we have not a fort that will bid defiance to all the Indians of the Chaco."

Tom went up the bank, and was fain to acknowledge that the position was strong. A number of palm trees had been cut down at the edge of the wood and in a semicircle to either shore, making a breastwork and abattis that no Indian would think of charging over. To prevent the reckless red-skins from spearing the defenders behind it, a row of spiky bushes had been laid outside the breastwork to keep them at a distance, and ax and hatchet were still at work, extending the barrier.

As soon as Tom arrived, all work was suspended. The close proximity of the Indians drove every one to his arms, and for some minutes a pause of silent expectation succeeded the busy activity of the post.

Then they heard the trampling of hoofs, and their relentless enemies bore in sight once more, sweeping along the edge of the forest.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE WARNING.

THE Indians did not seem to be perfectly certain of the position of our friends, for they came galloping past the edge of the breastwork, within fifty feet, all gathered in a dense body, and perfectly exposed.

Just as they reached the center of the little fortification a loud voice shouted a warning, and the whole body sheered off in confusion.

The revolver of Captain Hernandez cracked, and a close and well-delivered volley of rifles followed, the bullets tearing their way through the dark mass of men and horses with fearful effect.

As if stricken with a perfect panic, the survivors fled like the wind, leaving dead and dying horses and men by the dozens behind them.

Their numbers seemed to be much increased, as could be seen even in the dark, from those who had attacked in the morning.

"Some other tribe has joined them," said Captain Hernandez, as he looked at the retreating mob. "There are at least six hundred warriors there. Ha! we've no time to lose. I thought they wouldn't stay beaten. Here they come again. Load up and keep cool."

Sure enough, the dark mass on the pampa was agitated by a tumultuous movement, and in a very few minutes down came the whole body with a fierce yell, in one of their resolute charges.

The earth trembled beneath the thunder of hoofs: a front of glaring eyes and tossing manes became visible in the moonlight, while dark, weird figures crouched above, and a forest of lance-points glittered before the horses' heads. Like a vision of the night the strange spectacle burst on the sight, while one shrill, gathering yell rose higher and higher above the thundering of feet and the snorting of the steeds.

Then, with a tremendous shock, the Indian horsemen crashed through the fringe of palms that hid the breastwork, and came dashing up to the very foot of the breastwork.

Even as they came, a second volley was fired, but they did not seem even to notice it, except by a fiercer yell.

Then there was a shock and crash, as the horses blundered into the abattis, plunging wildly about up to the very barrier, their savage riders thrusting their spears over the bulwark, and raising their horses to leap.

But, just as with the rope before, so now with the log, the singular anomaly was presented of perfect horsemen utterly unable to leap, and horses that seemed to be spellbound before a four-foot barrier. Many of the wild steeds, entangled in the prickly abattis and plunging to get out, reared themselves up high enough to have leaped the barrier again and again, but they never seemed to think of doing it, and the shots of the revolvers that now rattled about their ears so incessantly soon settled the question.

Fierce and desperate as were the Indians, the rain of death was too severe, and they fell back at last, leaving twenty dead bodies and a number of badly wounded men and horses.

As they galloped off, Captain Hernandez observed: "We are safe for to-night. Let us make our fires and go to sleep. They will not attack again before daylight."

The captain proved to be right. There were but three or four hours remaining till morning, but these were passed in perfect quiet.

They could see the Indians lighting fires upon the pampa, and, as in the evening before, the fires were three in number. When the day broke three black columns of smoke were seen ascending into the air, and the effect was quickly apparent.

Even as the sun rose, they could see little strings of horsemen emerging from the distant woods, and making their way toward the fires.

It was plain that the latter were signals, and that the whole of the tribes of the Chaco were assembling to punish the intruders on their soil.

Don Luis began to look much troubled as he scanned the increasing forces of the savages. The forty-seven men on whom they could depend had been reduced by three more in the last night's assault, having been speared as they stood behind the barricade by the Indians who had blundered through the abattis.

The dead bodies of the enemy were out of all proportion to those of the whites, but the latter could less afford their losses, however small.

Captain Hernandez was the first to utter words of encouragement as the daylight came. The brave officer was as cool as a cucumber, and his soldiers were equally at their ease, to all appearance.

"Cheer up, lads," he said, laughingly. "Had we stayed with the wagons, we should be ten times worse off than we are, for there would be no means of escape and nothing to eat. As it is, the river lies behind us, full of fish; we are entrenched so strongly that all the Indians on the Chaco cannot dislodge us; and we have plenty of ammunition for a long fight."

"In my opinion," said Don Luis, in a low tone, "we shall be kept here for weeks unless we find a way to give those devils the slip. I see no earthly way to do it, either."

"Never fear," said the dragoon, boldly. "I shall try the effect of a vigorous defense first, and if that does not answer, why, we must even make a raft and float ourselves down the river. If we cross, we shall be comparatively out of danger. The other bank is free of foes."

"How long will it be so?" asked the estanciero, gloomily. "They can swim the stream on their horses without much trouble."

"At all events," said the captain, impatiently, "it's no use to borrow trouble. We are safe where we are, and those fellows are pretty well disgusted with their losses. Let us go to breakfast. We shall all fight better on full stomachs."

The matter-of-fact soldiers were already employed in preparing the morning meal, as coolly as if no enemy were near them. The fish in the river were so plentiful and voracious that ten minutes sufficed to catch enough for the whole party, and they were soon broiling on the coals.

The boys, young and light-hearted as they were, easily caught the infection of Hernandez's cheerful spirit, and Manuel Garcia was the only one who looked serious. He knew the real danger as well as his father, for Manuel had heard terrible tales of the reckless daring and implacable revenge of the Chaco Indians.

While they were eating their breakfast, the Indians were slowly assembling, till a cloud of mounted warriors, at least a thousand strong, were gathered together in the distance.

Then there was a movement in the mass, and four glittering figures rode out from the throng, and came galloping toward the bulwark that surrounded our party.

"A flag of truce," said the captain, as he watched them. "That's a point in our favor. If they chose to attack, we should be badly off, for they might break in at some point, and then where would be our chances?"

Tom Bullard, who said nothing, as usual, went to the bulwark and looked at the four advancing cavaliers. The gold ornaments that glistened on their bodies told that their rank must be that of caciques, for no one but the elders wore any sort of jewels.

As they came closer, he recognized the white locks of old Nabidagua, whose left arm was bound up in a sling. By his side rode two other old men, each a perfect counterpart of the old cacique, tall, erect, and still muscular and powerful, while their abundant hair was snow-white.

The fourth member of the party was no other than the Princess Malmora, mounted on a piebald steed, that Tom recognized as belonging to Nagua, the war-chief.

As they came nearer, it was observed that all were unarmed, while the princess carried a green palm branch, which she waved as she came, in token of amity.

"Senorito," said Captain Hernandez to Tom, "you have already done so much for us that I cannot ask you to do more; still I wish that you would meet those people and ask what they want. You know their language. Sergeant Gonzales shall go with you."

"All right, Cap," said "Plug," curtly.

He leaped on his horse, put the animal at the barrier, and leaped him over with an ease that showed that the pampas horses only needed a little training to become perfect leapers. Then the Paraguayan sergeant followed by a gap that was left for the purpose, and both walked their horses out of the wood to meet the envoys.

Tom and Gonzales each carried a revolver in his hand, for the tales of Indian treachery were too fresh in the minds of each to trust to the seeming absence of weapons among the old caciques.

When the latter were about fifty feet off, "Plug" presented his pistol, and shouted:

"Halt! Walk your horses, or I'll fire."

The Indians, with one accord, curbed their foaming steeds, and advanced at a foot-pace to where Tom awaited them.

"Keep your revolver ready, senorito," muttered Sergeant Gonzales. "I don't trust those devils. I've known them to throw knives before this."

Tom took the hint.

"Halt, you're near enough," he said. "What do you want?"

The three caciques halted, and each raised his hand to his head in a gesture of high-toned courtesy. Old Nabidagua muttered a few words to the rest, and it was evident that they all recognized and admired Tom.

"My son is very brave for one so young," said Nabidagua. "Thrice has he foiled our best warriors. He is braver than all the rest of the white men. As for them, they are cowardly capinchas, that flee to the water; but my son is a jaguar that faces his prey and tear-it."

Tom bowed his head.

"What do you want, then?" he repeated.

The lad was certain that the adroit flattery of the old chief covered some ulterior design, and he was not going to fall into a trap.

"I want my son," said the old man, gravely. "He was well treated with the Abipones; no cord shackled his limbs. We gave him a horse to ride. He was to wed the youngest daughter of Nabidagua, a maiden whom all the warriors foiled after in vain. Why has my son left the children of the Chaco, whose horse-hoofs are terrible in the ears of the whites? While he was with us, he was a man. Now he has joined himself to the cowardly whites, whose fire-arms slay from afar, who hide behind logs, and who fear to meet the lance of a naked warrior, because their hearts are small. Come back to us, and let us exterminate the whites; then shall my son be king of the Chaco."

"Is that all?" asked Tom, quietly.

"Not all. My son must give up the horses he has taken from us."

"And what if we do this?" asked the boy. "Can my companions go free?"

"Not so," said Nabidagua, gravely. "They are in our power, and their lives are ours. Still, we will give them their lives, if they will give up their weapons and horses."

"Then we may as well stop talking," said Tom. "If you want our horses and weapons you must come and take them. Good-by."

As he spoke, he waved his revolver with a gesture of dismissal, but the chief did not stir.

"My son will think better of this," he said. "We will give the whites till sunset to decide. When the sun touches the mountains it will be too late. Even my son's life will be forfeit. Beware."

He quietly turned his horse away, and was followed by the three caciques. Malmora impetuously approached Tom, and looked earnestly at him.

"Why will the Jaguar-heart refuse?" she said, pleadingly. "We have forgiven him all, and spared his friends for his sake. To-night mercy is at an end."

"Look at those breastworks, and tell me if we need ask for mercy yet," said the lad, proudly.

"You will see when it is too late," she said.

"Farewell."

A moment later she was galloping away, and Tom returned slowly to the ramparts.

When he reported the result of the interview, Captain Hernandez looked grave. He said nothing about it to any one, but he immediately issued orders to strengthen the log ramparts, and to extend the abattis by cutting more timber.

The light stems of the palm trees yielded to the blows of the ax with an ease that was astonishing to those used to hard woods. Louis noticed it, and spoke to Manuel.

"Manuel, how is it those great trees come down so quickly? It seems as if they were made of nothing but pith."

Manuel pointed to one of the prostrate palms.

"It's not far from that," he observed. "You see there is only a ring of hard wood outside, and the inside is all full of this pith, as soft as so much new bread. Most of these palms are sago palm, and if we had them on the dock at Buenos Ayres, they would be worth a good many dollars. As it is, they're light as cork."

Here Louis noticed that the men under Hernandez's orders, having cut and trimmed off the palm logs, began to roll them down toward the river, by whose banks a number of them were soon collected.

This puzzled the boys, who could not conceive that any defense was needed on that side. The Indians on the plain were to be seen lazily clustered round the fires, apparently taking no interest in the motions of the whites, although fresh accessions of strength were constantly reaching them.

Such was the posture of affairs, when Captain Hernandez, noticing that noon was approaching, and wishing to save provisions, proposed that our boys, who were not strong enough to do the heavy work of hauling logs, should cross the river on a little raft made of palm logs, and try to shoot something for dinner.

All consented with alacrity, and Manuel Garcia, who was known as the oldest and most prudent, was put in charge of the party.

"By no means venture out of sight of the river," said Don Luis. "As long as you see and hear us, you are comparatively safe; but there is no telling how many of the foot Indians of the forest may be hidden in these shades. Therefore take care."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PECARIES ON THE WAR-PATH.

THE voyage over the river was safely and speedily performed, two of the light palm logs, lashed together with lassoes, being ample to float our four boys and Dona Inez, who had joined the party at her own request.

The young girl seemed as happy as a lark, now that she was under the protection of her lover, Captain Hernandez, and was up to any sort of fun and frolic.

As for the captain, he saw her depart with perfect unconcern, for he well knew that all the real danger lay in their front, as the foot Indians of the forest are generally quite peaceable.

The little raft was poled across without any diffi-

culty, and our young adventurers landed at the entrance of as beautiful a forest as they had ever seen. All the luxuriance of tropic vegetation was displayed around them in the utmost variety. The dark-green leaves of the caoutchouc or india-rubber tree contrasted with the bright foliage of hundreds of palms, while the flowers of gay-colored orchids hung in heavy festoons from the trees; and, hid behind their clusters, the arch-looking, agile monkeys skipped about from branch to branch, and looked down, chattering and screaming, at the intruders on their haunts.

"Oh, what a beautiful place!" exclaimed Dona Inez, enthusiastically. "And what lovely birds!" she added, a moment later, as several tiny humming-birds, looking like winged jewels, flashed past them in the rays of the sunlight, as they pierced the leafy screen above.

Then came a loud screaming, making such a discordant din that they all shut their ears involuntarily. A flock of purple and blue macaws went flying past them, and disappeared in the recesses of the wood.

A step further and they roused more game. There was a great rush and grunting, and a herd of capinchas dashed past them and plunged headlong into the river, some of them dropping off the bank twenty feet above the water, without fear.

One of them was not quick enough, however, for Manuel's double-barrel was at his shoulder like a flash, and one of the capinchas rolled over, with a charge of buck-shot through his lungs.

The carcass was rolled down the bank in short order to the raft, where it was loaded on, the raft firmly secured by the ends of the lassoes, head and stern, while the young hunters proceeded further into the wood.

They seemed to be in a perfect paradise of game, for at every step something started up and vanished. Louis soon had a bagful of parrots and macaws, which he had shot with his revolvers; and even Dona Inez had caught the enthusiasm, and was trying her shooting powers with a little revolver she had borrowed of the captain.

Insensibly, they wandered on, away from the river, forgetful of Don Luis's injunction, till Tom Bullard, who sauntered slowly in the rear and had not yet fired a shot, was the only person who could catch a glimpse of the water.

Dona Inez was in advance of all the rest, with Jack Curtis near her. The little lady had made several fair shots, and she was growing ambitious to excel. She had given her empty revolver to Jack to load, and borrowed his full one. She stole forward, full of eagerness, and suddenly stopped.

"Oh, see there, Senor Juan," said the girl, delightedly, pointing, "yonder lies a herd of capinchas asleep, and I shall take one to keep company with that of Don Manuel."

There, sure enough, were a lot of creatures like small pigs, lying stretched in a sunny glade at their ease; and they bore sufficient resemblance to capinchas to deceive a girl who had never seen but one.

Dona Inez rested her revolver on the branch of a low-spreading tree, took careful aim at one of the animals and fired, just as Manuel Garcia came up from the rear with Louis.

At the sound of that shot such a commotion ensued as surprised every one. The supposed capinchas leaped up with a chorus of fierce grunts, and revealed themselves as so many little, rough-looking, black pigs, with white lips and eyelids, which suddenly charged down on them without a shadow of hesitation.

"Peccaries!" cried Manuel, in horrified tones. "Run for the river, quick, senorita, while we hold them at bay! They'll cut us to bits."

There was no need to tell Inez to run. She dropped her pistol and fled the instant she saw the savage little creatures, and as luck would have it, ran directly toward the river.

Tom, who was sauntering coolly in the rear, no sooner saw her terror than he drew a revolver, crying:

"What's the matter, senorita? Indians?"

"Peccaries," was the breathless reply, as the girl fled past him to the raft, with a white face.

Tom's countenance clouded. He knew the dangers of the peccaries of old, and had heard too many stories of their ferocity not to fear for his friends. He heard revolvers cracking in his front, squeals and grunts and cries of pain, and he ran forward to the fray, a pistol in each hand.

He had not far to go. In twenty steps he saw the fight, Manuel, Jack Curtis, and Louis Ledoux, surrounded by the vicious little beasts which were grunting and snapping their tusks.

The lads were firing at their assailants, and striking at them with their pistols to keep them off. Already Louis and Manuel had been cut in two or three places, and there seemed every chance that they would fare badly, when Tom ran in and fired shot after shot, with all the cool deliberation for which he was noted. His fifth shot released the friends from their most formidable enemies, and the peccaries all turned on Tom.

"Run!" shouted he, as he blazed away his last shots, as fast as he could pull the triggers.

The sudden burst stayed the fierce creatures one moment. The next, they were in full pursuit, as Tom bounded away to the river, followed by his friends. Had it been a long race, the peccaries would have most undoubtedly killed them all. As it was, they all four reached the bank with only trifling cuts, and the next moment leaped far out into the river.

Almost in the same breath, the peccaries followed! Jack Curtis went down under the water, and as he went, he heard a loud scream. It proceeded from Dona Inez.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BOY WARRIORS.

WHEN Dona Inez reached the raft, she instinctively ran out to its very end, where she dropped on her knees, bewildered with terror. She had not even sense to cast off the fastenings, and the raft lay along the shore, entirely exposed to any creature that should come there.

A moment later, she heard the plunges of heavy bodies in the river, as the four boys jumped in, followed by the peccaries. It was lucky for her that the chase was down-stream, and that the peccaries were poor swimmers, for the strong current kept them away from her.

She saw Tom Bullard and the rest dive and disappear, and a moment later old Plug's black head came to the surface close to shore, and he scrambled up the bank not fifty feet below, and ran up the beach toward her.

A single pecary managed to follow him, but the current had swept it lower, and Tom reached the raft before the fierce little beast was fairly ashore. Then with a pluck such as no other animal possesses, the pecary came rushing along the bank to revenge itself on Tom, all alone as it was.

But the Western boy had not been idle all this time. The head-fast of the raft was cast off before the pecary reached him, and the current swept the logs away from shore in an instant. Tom caught up the pole, for it was too late to cast off the other fast, and sprung on the raft in front of Dona Inez. Without a shade of hesitation the pecary rushed at him, and scrambled on the slippery logs, grunting and snapping its tusks. Tom retreated to the very end of the raft, and allowed his enemy to advance more than half-way, when the pole swept the air with all his strength, and knocked Master Piggy into the river, with a splash.

"Plug" only tarried long enough to see that the current had carried his foe below him, when he dropped his pole, ran to end of the raft, drew his knife, and cut the stern-fast, so that the raft glided away down-stream.

He heard a great shouting on the opposite bank, where the soldiers had perceived their peril, but there was no time to lose. He knew that his comrades were in the water, surrounded with foes; and he caught up the pole, and with a fierce shove sent the raft whirling into the full strength of the current.

Then he had time to look for the boys. He saw them in the midst of the river, nearly a quarter of a mile below him, and the black heads of the implacable peccaries were all round them.

Tom uttered a short but heartfelt prayer for help, and began to drive the raft down with all his strength. Luckily the river was very shallow there, and his pole was long. In a very few shoves he found himself flying down-stream and rapidly gaining on the swimmers.

Take the other pole, senorita, and help," he panted, as Dona Inez, now that the immediate danger was over, looked quieter. "Shove hard, as you see me do, or we shall lose our friends. Quick!"

The young girl jumped up, eagerly enough, and caught up one of the long poles that lay between the two logs. Slight as was her strength, the assistance was noticeable. The raft went flying along, and in a very few minutes swept round a turn of the river out of sight of the camp. The swimmers were not fifty yards below them.

"Courage!" shouted Tom, as he noticed that his three friends were some distance from the peccaries, and that the latter were scattered about and trying to reach the shore. "We'll be on you directly."

Dona Inez, hearing the words, redoubled her efforts, and a few minutes later the three boys, nearly exhausted from swimming in their clothes, were hanging on the side of the raft.

Tom threw down his pole, flew to their assistance, and hauled out "Kitty" the first. The poor lad was pale as death, and the blood was flowing from several cuts on his body. Manuel was next and he fell on the raft beside Louis, too weak to stand. Jack Curtis was only slightly cut, and managed to scramble up without help. Then Tom took a look around them, and for the first time realized the perils of the past, and those that remained.

They were out of sight of the camp, racing down the river at the rate of eight miles an hour, and the banks, on one side at least, were full of enemies.

"Come, Pickle," said Tom, gruffly. "We're in a fix, if you don't take hold. You're not as weak as the rest. Take a pole, man, and send herscoting, or we'll lose our hides."

"Pickle" needed no second invitation. Bold and daring by nature, the last few months had rendered him self-reliant. Like Tom, he had become so much accustomed to Indian habits that he had relinquished the irksome clothes that the rest of the party wore, a circumstance that told in his favor in the water, and had saved him much fatigue.

He picked up a pole, and gallantly went to work to help Tom to stem the current and work upstream.

But they soon found that such a current was not so easy to stem. They were rid of the peccaries, who had scattered in disgust, but the current kept on sweeping them down, in spite of their efforts.

"It's no use, Plug," said Jack, at last. "We can only sheer off to the further shore. No man alive could stem this current. We're safe there, and we can make our way back by land."

"How about the peccaries?" said Tom, curtly. "They're ashore."

"We must take our chances," said Jack. "I don't see what else we can do. I lost my revolver in the river, and all my cartridges are soaked if I had it. We can't do anything but starve on this raft."

Tom made no answer. He still retained one of his

pistols in the holster, where he had instinctively placed it, when he scrambled ashore, and he knew that his copper cartridges were waterproof. But he knew also that this was the only weapon in the party save knives. The rest were on the bottom of the river.

Without a word, he helped Jack to shove the raft shoreward, and they eventually reached it, after being driven at least half a mile further.

Just as they did so, they heard a tremendous yelling, far up the river, followed by the crashing of a volley, and the incessant rattle of firearms that tells of a brisk fight.

"They're attacking the camp, Plug," said Jack, hurriedly. "We can never get back alive."

"We're just as well where we are, then," said Tom, dryly. "If they beat 'em off, good. If not—"

Here Manuel Garcia, who was slowly recovering his strength, sat up on the raft and ejaculated:

"Look out, Plug; here comes the enemy!"

The raft was lying alongside of a steep bank, where the bushes hung over the water, till their lower branches dipped. Tom and Jack, at either end, held on to the tushes, and kept the little structure stationary. As Manuel spoke the boys heard a yell on the opposite bank, and a large troop of Indians, with glittering lances, came plunging through the underwood, and dashed their horses into the water without a moment's hesitation.

Manuel slowly rose up. With great presence of mind he had been bandaging his numerous cuts all the while he lay on the raft, for though none of them were deep, the loss of blood was considerable.

As for little Louis he lay on the raft, nearly insensible, tender-hearted Dona Inez weeping over him, for Louis was a general favorite. The boy's cuts were numerous, and the Spanish girl had done her best to bandage them, but without restoring him to consciousness.

In this state of affairs, fifty savages were swimming toward them, eager for their lives, and the racket up-stream announced that a fierce battle was going on there.

It was Manuel Garcia who here showed himself the most collected of the party. Even Tom began to feel desperate, and as for Jack Curtis, the remembrance of what was in store for him at Indian hands made him shudder violently.

"See here, fellows," said Manuel, in the old school-boy fashion that reminded them all of old times; "things are not so bad as you think. Plug and Pickle are both able to pole the raft, and though I can't work, I can shoot. Tom, I know your pistol's a 'Smith and Wesson,' and carries copper cartridges. Lend it to me, and while you two fellows pole, I'll shoot. One thing we're sure of—they've no firearms, and we have the heels of them on the river. Cheer up, fellows! I wouldn't have the boys at old Wolcott's know we flunked into a scrape we couldn't fight our way out of. Keep cool; we're not dead yet."

Tom Bullard quietly unbuckled his belt, and gave it to Manuel.

"Wiseman, you're a gilt-edged brick," he said, emphatically. "I own I was getting skeered; but by Jingo we'll git out of this scrape, if there's any git out at all. What's the orders, Cap?—you're captain now."

Manuel turned his eye on the swimming horsemen, and scanned them keenly ere he answered.

The river was several hundred yards broad at this point, comparatively shallow, rocky, and very swift. The consequence was that the Indians, boldly as they rode in, made but little progress.

Near the further shore there was some footing, but the violence of the current was so great that the horses could only advance a step at a time, and when it came to swimming depth, they were swept far down the river.

"I think we can wait awhile," said Wiseman, calmly. "They can't get at us here, you know; and if we wait till they come close, we can pop them off at our leisure. Hark! the fight's beginning to slacken up the river."

In fact, the sound of musketry was slowly ceasing, and only heard in occasional dropping shots, though the yelling came as loud as ever.

The Indians on the other side, who had not ridden into the water, divided into two parties. While one rode up the river-bank, the other dashed in and began to swim vigorously across, taking a slant across the current that promised to bring them ashore at a point far below the raft.

"Now we'll soon see," said Manuel, quietly, as he pushed out the empty cartridges of Tom's pistol, blew the water out of the chambers and barrel, and proceeded to reload from Tom's pouch. "They think they've got us this time, Plug; but they'll find their mistake out in a short time. I like to cheat those savage devils."

"You bet," replied Tom, laconically. "If we only had another pistol, I wouldn't care for the whole tribe."

By this time the swimming horsemen were far below them, and one of them was landing on the same shore. As he rode out of the water he uttered a triumphant yell, brandished his spear, and came galloping along the narrow margin of the stream under the bank. His yell was answered from the opposite side, but much higher up-stream, and they saw the other party of Indians dash in far above them, and come foaming down the current with a rapidity and on a course that threatened to bring them down on the raft in a very short time.

"Keep cool, Pickle," said Manuel, sternly, to Jack, for the latter was looking nervous and excited, and evinced signs of letting go the bushes. "Keep hold with your right hand so. Now cross your pole, so that the end may rest on that rock that sticks half out of the bank. Plug, you do the same. Now when

I call out, 'Shove off!' both let go and shove with all your might. We'll go down-stream like a bird and cheat them all. Ready now."

A chorus of yells below announced the landing of more Indians. Manuel looked round and saw at least twenty come tearing along the bank at full speed.

The first who landed had dashed into the water again, not thirty feet below them, and stood midleg in the swift current to intercept them. He could go no further, for the overhanging bank and the current prevented his riding in the water.

A second glance up-stream showed a mob of Indians, grim, silent and eager, almost upon them, and swimming fast.

Manuel sat down so as to steady his aim.

"Shove off!" he cried.

The raft, released from its bondage and obedient to the powerful shove of the poles, shot out into the stream like an arrow, gliding past the waiting warrior just out of reach of his lance.

A yell of savage fury announced that the Indians expected and were prepared for the trick, and the next moment every horseman below dashed into the stream, and swam boldly out to intercept the flight of our young friends.

The nearest warrior wheeled his horse and came swimming after, so near that his lance almost touched Jack Curtis, who retreated several feet in some trepidation. The Indian, by a desperate effort, forged a little nearer, and Jack cried:

"Shoot him, Wiseman! shoot him!"

"Knock him over, Pickle!" said Manuel, sharply. "I can't waste a shot on him. Your pole's longer than his lance, you fool."

Emboldened by the command, Jack lifted his twenty-foot pole from the water, and brought it down on the head of the Indian's horse, who swerved aside and fell back instantly.

"Good for you!" shouted Plug, as he poked his own long weapon into the face of another animal. "That's your sort! Keep off the horses, and the men are nowhere."

At that moment came a violent shock of the raft, as they ran right into another horseman who had got before them unnoticed. Manuel wheeled round, just as the Indian poised his spear, and shot him through the heart, the pistol nearly touching him.

With a shout, the warrior fell back and sunk, but the struggles of the horse to get out of the way of the raft delayed its progress so much, that three of the intercepting Indians were enabled to get close by.

Tom Bullard felt a sharp pain in his right thigh, as a lance grazed him, and turning savagely round, dashed the point of his pole in the face of Nagua, the Abipone chief. He saw the Indian stagger back, and repeated the blow in his horse's face. At the same time the raft drifted clear of the incumbent horse, and Tom heard two rapid shots from Manuel's pistol.

Then they went flying down the river leaving their foes behind, and there was but a single Indian left in front of them, and that one was evidently frightened and trying to escape.

"By jingo, Plug, it's Malmora," shouted Curtis, excitedly, as they shot down, and recognized the gold coronet and jewels of the wild princess.

Tom turned and looked. Then, with a violent shove, he sent the raft whirling past her, dropped his pole, leaned over, caught the girl by her long hair with one hand, by the arm with the other, and pulled her on the raft with a skill and strength that took her entirely by surprise.

"Now, my lady," said Tom, grimly, "you've given us enough trouble for to-day. I guess you'll make a good hostage."

CHAPTER XXX. THE GREAT RAFT.

We must now return to the camp, where we left Captain Hernandez and Don Luis hard at work strengthening their defenses, while the boys went over the river to hunt.

For some time after their departure the sound of axes was incessant, and every available hand was employed in cutting down palm-trees and rolling logs. Don Luis, with two or three men, kept watch at the breastwork, and carried the bushy and spiky heads of the palms, to extend the abattis in front.

Captain Hernandez, on the other hand, was busily engaged near the water-side, where it soon became evident that he was making a raft.

A splendid raft it was, too, the light round logs of palm-wood being exceedingly buoyant. There were some fifty or more lances available; for, gaucho or soldier, every man in the party was provided with one; and the work proceeded with astonishing rapidity, once the logs were cut.

By the time twenty logs were in the water, the structure was strong enough to sustain the whole party, but the captain was not satisfied till every lasso was used up, and a broad, dry raft floated alongside the bank, secured at each end to keep it from drifting down-stream.

"There," said the dragoon, with a deep sigh of relief, as he tried the raft by stamping in different places; "let the devils come now: we're ready for them!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth, when the shriek of a girl sounded from the opposite wood, followed by a burst of pistol-shots, and shouts and cries of anger and terror; and then, down the bank came flying Dona Inez, and covered on her knees at the end of the small raft. It seemed but a moment later, when the four boys appeared below, and plunged into the water, followed by the peccaries.

"Cut loose the raft, Inez, and push off!" roared the captain, half-frantic at the danger. "They'll tear you to pieces."

As he spoke, several peccaries rushed into the water below, and tried to swim to the little raft, the first object they saw in their blind fury. Inez, paralyzed with terror, stirred not.

"Thank God!" cried the captain, as he saw Tom Bullard land and run to the little raft. "There's one with his senses about him."

He saw the brief struggle on the raft, the victory over the peccary, and saw the little vessel shoot away down-stream after the boys.

He knew that nothing more could be done; and his confidence in Tom was so great that he ceased to call out directions.

Instead of that, he began to hurry the preparations for the voyage, for he well knew the danger that those on the small raft would run, should the Indians pursue them.

"Lead the horses on board," he shouted; and the obedient soldiers brought the animals forward as soon as the words were spoken.

The face of the large raft had been covered with bushes and grass, so as to fill the interstices between the logs, and afford a footing for the horses, but the poor creatures floundered and tumbled about sadly.

Patience and knowledge of horsemanship conquered all these difficulties, however, and the greater part of the animals were on board, when Don Luis, from the rampart, shouted:

"*Cuidado! Los Indios! Cuidado!*"

In a trice, the embarkation was abandoned, and the whole of the garrison rushed to the breastworks, where they beheld a new and fearful peril approaching.

The Indian camp, lately so quiet, had vanished like magic.

Instead thereof, a horde of mounted savages, that seemed to stretch round the whole visible horizon, was moving slowly down on them, at a walk.

"Fill your front pockets with cartridges," said the captain, hurriedly. "Those fellows won't be stopped so easily. If they break in, follow me to the raft, and push off; but retire fighting, or we're lost."

He had hardly finished, when the Indians raised a yell, shook their lances, and came sweeping down like a whirlwind.

There was no time for more orders. Instinctively every man waited till the wave of horsemen was almost up to the abattis, when they sent in their first volley, which rolled over the front rank like nine-pins.

But such was the determination of the Indians, that the rush was not even checked. The survivors bounded over the bodies of men and horses, stumbling and tripping, but still defiant as ever, and in a moment more were crashing through the bushes of the abattis.

"Load up! Keep your pistols full for the last!" yelled Hernandez, in excited tones, as he thrust a fresh charge into his rifle.

The order was obeyed, and a second volley sent into the entangled horsemen, within ten seconds of the first. The effect was fearful at that short range, the bodies of men and horses positively blocking up the way. Brave as were the Indians, and closely as they rushed to the bulwark, they could not force their animals over the dead bodies.

For a moment there was a check, during which the wild men dashed up and down, yelling and brandishing their spears, in the vain search for a gap.

A third volley tore through their dense masses, and they recoiled involuntarily to a little distance. Then part of the huge mass broke off from the rest, and swept down toward the river, when the captain cried:

"Now's your time! To the raft quickly! Never mind the rest of the horses. To the raft!"

It needed no second order. With one accord every man broke for the river, and all were on board in a marvelously short time. The fasts were cast off, the poles shoved with desperate energy, and the huge mass floated slowly out into the stream, just as the first Indian broke into the redoubt, coming through the gateway.

It was the cacique Nabidagua.

He was followed by a dense crowd of warriors, who swarmed in, spearing the few horses that were left, and dashing recklessly into the river after the raft, when it was already some thirty feet from shore.

But the huge machine, slow to gather momentum, was irresistible when started. The Indians closed up to it with ease, but there their powers ended. The impetus of the horse was lost in the water, and the lance, so formidable at full speed, was nearly useless.

A rapid fire of pistols soon cleared the edges of the raft; and as it kept its way in the middle of the stream, the power of the current swept it swiftly down the river, past the enraged and disappointed savages.

But the latter were far too untiring and implacable to give up the chase. The party that had gone down the river began to yell loudly, and the whole force of the Indians went off at a tearing gallop down the river-bank, as if determined to intercept them at some known spot.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculated Don Luis, as they swept on in temporary safety; "they cannot catch us now, I think."

Captain Hernandez made no answer. He was at the head of the raft, looking anxiously down-stream.

"It's strange we don't see anything of the boys and Inez," he said, at last. "I could swear those fellows went after them."

The same instant they heard a shot ahead of them, closely followed by two more. The shots indicated the close proximity of the small raft, and, sure enough, as they swept round the bend of the stream, they caught sight of Manuel, running the gantlet of the Indians, and finally scraping safe past.

Their own numbers and weapons rendered them fearless of the few Indians that were left, and as they swept past the struggling horses, they opened a scattering fire. It was nearly harmless, however, for the wily savages dived at the flash, and the great raft passed on in triumph.

In a few vigorous shoves they neared the little raft, just as Tom captured Malmora, when all hands joined in a cheer of joy, that was echoed by the savage yells of the Indians on shore.

The occupants of the small raft were transferred to the large one, and away they went, floating down the turbid Pilcomayo, in comparative safety once more.

CHAPTER XXXI. A GIRL'S DARING.

Our reunited party on the great raft were now in much better spirits. The Indians being totally unprovided with missile weapons, and equally destitute of boats, the voyageurs could afford to laugh at them as they swept along. The boys especially were wild with delight, and even poor little Luis, who was comfortably bestowed on a bed of grass, smiled with a look of contempt, as he watched the Indians racing along the banks of the river, which grew broader and broader at every mile passed.

The horsemen rode at a tremendous pace, and quickly distanced the raft, which now only drifted with the current. The woods grew less and less thick on the banks, and it was obvious that the Pilcomayo was bearing them down to the open pampas, but still their enemies rode on ahead, nearly as numerous as ever.

Captain Hernandez was the only one on the raft who seemed to be at all uneasy. He stood at the head, watching the fast-vanishing Indians, and when Don Luis made a jocular remark about the latter wasting their pains, he said, gravely:

"I wish I was certain of that. Now, to my mind, it looks as if they had some plan of mischief, or else why do they keep on?"

"Let them have all their plans," said Don Luis, contemptuously. "I laugh at their plans, Alonzo. We have the daughter of their head cacique a prisoner, and her head shall pay for any mischief they do."

The captain had not noticed the presence of Malmora on board, he had been so much taken up with his own special betrothed. He turned with much interest, and exclaimed:

"Is that true? Then it explains all. You notice that those fellows seem to be all of one band? No doubt it is the one to which she belongs, and they are following us to rescue her."

"It might be as well to put her ashore then," suggested Don Luis, in a musing tone. "They might leave us, in that case."

"Not a bit of it," said the captain, laughing grimly. "You'd make a poor soldier, Luis. Let us keep on, down the river. Every mile tires their horses, and leaves us fresh. They shall ransom her with enough horses to remount our whole crew or she shall be food for fishes."

"But surely you wouldn't hurt a woman?" said the estanciero, surprised.

"No," said Hernandez; "but *they* sha'n't know that. A cacique's child is well worth a hundred fresh horses."

"How shall we get them if we tire them out?" asked Don Luis, with a smile.

"Get them from the tribes below," said the dragoon, sharply. "I'll teach these naked savages to hunt a Spanish hidego. They shall pay for every man I've lost; thirteen as good dragoons as ever wore spur, speared by those wild devils of Abipones. *Por Dios*, my blood's up, and I'll have revenge."

The captain's eye flashed. He was a true Spaniard after all, remorseless when he had the power, though brave under peril. It seemed that he had the power at last, as he looked at the graceful form of Malmora, and remembered that she was a cacique's daughter.

They swept on now, not quite so rapidly, as the river grew broader, but still at a brisk pace. The woods diminished to patches, the stretches of savanna became larger. At every turn of the stream they still saw the Abipones ahead, and also distinguished the smoke of signal-fires in several directions.

"I don't like those fires," said Don Luis. "Some of the pedestrian tribes live below us, and they use bows and arrows and canoes. They might give us trouble, if they join hands with the Abipones."

"We shall soon see," said the captain. "For my part I think we'd best steer over to the further bank. We must be getting near the Faraguay; and if so we shall be safe on that side, the river here being too broad to swim. Besides, we have nothing to eat, and it comes near sunset. Those lads made such a mess of their hunting, that they left all their game up the river."

"Agreed," said the estanciero, as he looked at the level sun.

Accordingly the raft was sheered over toward the eastern shore, as soon as the water shallowed sufficiently to use the poles. In about an hour's time they were moored beside a little grove of palms, that proved to be full of game, and likewise of jaguars.

Three of these fierce creatures were roused in as many minutes, but our adventurers were getting too much accustomed to them to fear them any longer. The soldiers no longer fired wide, and the very first volley brought down two, and mortally wounded the third, which was dispatched with pistols.

Then a strong skirmish line swept through the wood, and roused up deer, peccaries and capinchas, besides two tapirs, queer-looking beasts, with trunks like that of an elephant cut short.

In a very few shots game enough was secured to

feed the whole party; and the fires were lighted in security, after the manifold perils of the Chaco, in the short tropic twilight.

"What a change from last night!" said Dona Inez, thoughtfully, as she stood by her lover's side, gazing off over the smoothly-flowing river. "Who would have thought that we should be as safe as this to-night, at the time when those raging demons were galloping after us, trying to destroy us?"

"We are by no means safe yet," said the soldier, in a low tone. "I shall not feel secure till we have passed Asuncion and Corrientes. The fishing Indians below us may puzzle us yet. Besides that, we are not safe even now from the Abipones swimming over after us. Ha, what's that?"

As he spoke, there was a sudden commotion among the herd of horses that had been landed and was feeding near them. A dark figure was seen to spring up in the midst of the herd as if by magic, uttering a shrill, girlish scream of triumph, and away went the whole herd, snorting and squealing, over the fires, through the camp, and down the river-bank like a whirlwind.

The whole thing passed so suddenly that no one summoned his presence of mind till the last hoof was gone, all but the captain's horse, which was tied to a tree close by. It was a regular stampede.

Then Hernandez uttered a great Spanish imprecation.

"It's that cursed Indian girl, I'll lay my life," he roared. "Where is she?"

"Gone, senior captain," said the voice of Tom Bullard. "Lend me your horse, and I'll stable every hoof in an hour."

"Take him, lad," said the dragoon, hurriedly. "He has English blood, and he'll run them down. You're a light weight. Here, take my pistols."

"I want none for a girl," said Tom, curtly. "Lend me a lasso."

As he spoke, he was mounting.

"There's one on the saddle," said Hernandez. "Away with you."

"Adios!" cried Tom, and away he flew.

There was not much supper after that. The meal was hastily swallowed in silence, and all hands went aboard the raft in gloomy silence, sheered out into the stream, and poled down the river as fast as they could go.

For a long time they could hear the thunder of hoofs on the bank, but these grew fainter and fainter at last, for a stampede always is carried at a fearful speed. The raft floated on, the darkness grew thicker and thicker, and they could no longer hear the horses.

"That Indian girl must be an artful devil," observed the captain, in a vicious tone. "She looked so meek and beautiful, I never distrusted her. How did she get off?"

"Easy enough," said Manuel Garcia, who was standing by. "It's my impression that Plug was half spoony on her. He told me to-day that he thought it was a shame to keep her if we were safe. It's my belief he helped her to escape, thinking she'd take only her own horse, and that she's played him false. But if she has, Tom's the boy to catch her again, if any one can."

"I'll bet on Plug," said Louis Ledoux, feebly, as he listened to the conversation. "You can go to sleep safe, Cap. You'll see the horses in the morning."

CHAPTER XXXII. OLD PLUG'S BEST CATCH.

THE SUN rose over the broad pampas of the southern Gran Chaco, near the borders of the province of Santa Fe, and revealed a lovely landscape. Little patches of wood were scattered over the plain at wide intervals, like islands in the sea, and through the midst of all ran the broad and placid Pilcomayo, on its way to join the still broader Paraguay.

A group of Indians, clad in mantles of fur, stood on the banks of the river, eagerly watching the water. A peculiar appearance was visible in the midst of the stream, toward which their eyes were directed.

A low bank of black mud, in the midst of the river, was, to all appearance, alive with moving creatures, and what was more wonderful, the island seemed to be in motion.

The Indians were all armed with bows of great size, with arrows over a yard in length. The moving island was sheering slowly over to their side of the river, and there seemed to be some excitement about it.

The course of the floating island, if island it was, was steady up-stream, and one of the Indians observed:

"It is time. They are within shot. Now let us prove who has the best eye."

As he spoke he drew an arrow to the head, pointed it toward the sky at an angle of forty-five degrees, and let fly.

The arrow rose high in air, described a graceful curve, and descended on the top of one of the moving creatures.

"Well done, Sago!" cried a young Indian, as he drew his bow; "the turtle is yours. Here goes for mine."

All of the Indians let fly their arrows in the same manner, but not with equal success. One flew right over the shoal of turtles, for this it was at which all were aiming; two more went into the water between the animals without injury, but four more stuck in the turtles, and the Indians uttered a triumphant shout.

The turtles were coming up the river to lay their eggs, and they were so wary, that the sight of a boat would make them dive. The Indians on the banks of the Pilcomayo were wont to shoot them in this manner as they passed them, knowing that every

turtle struck was sure to float at the top of the water, when dead.

With great joy they were proceeding to launch a canoe, to take possession of their prizes, when the thunder of hoofs behind them caused them to start and look round.

A numerous troop of mounted Indians, whom they recognized as their masters, the Abipones, were galloping slowly and wearily from behind a copse to the river-bank.

We say their masters, the Abipones, for it is a strange fact that the equestrian Indians of the Chaco maintain a sort of feudal rule over their humbler brethren, who live by the river and cultivate fields, and compel them to labor for their support, both round their own holds, and by sharing the produce of the fisheries.

Not that the Abipones, Tovas, and others, are hard masters. On the contrary, their servitude is light, and only exacted at certain seasons, besides being paid for, in kind, by the produce of their raids.

In front of this party of Abipones, rode the white-haired cacique, Nabidagua, and his first question was to the point.

"Have you seen a great raft of timber, full of white men, pass down the river?"

"No, dread lord," said old Sago, obsequiously.

"Then we have not ridden in vain," said the old chief. "Get out your boats quick, and ferry us across the river. The dogs are on the other side."

The slavish foot Indians were not used to handy words with their masters. In a few minutes several large "dog-outs" were launched, and the Abipones were prepared.

"Bows and arrows," said the old chief, gruffly. "The lance for the land, but we are fighting water-rats, like you. Give us the bows."

With equal readiness, the docile Guarani yielded their weapons, and procured more from the village close by, till all the Abipones, to the number of nearly two hundred, were armed.

Some of the bows were of huge size, and of such stiffness, that no man could fully bend them with his arms. The Abipones seemed to be perfectly conversant with their use however, for old Nabidagua smiled grimly, as he took an enormous bow about seven feet long, with the remark:

"It will shoot as far as the fire-weapon of the white man, and pierce as many breasts at a pinch."

As he was examining the weapon, and while the boats were putting off, one of the Abipones uttered a cry and pointed to the other bank.

A number of horses, without riders, following a single figure on a black steed, and pursued by a man on a gray horse, were galloping along the further bank of the river, full speed.

The keen eyes of the old chief recognized his daughter in a minute, and all the Abipones raised a simultaneous yell.

"It is Malmora! She cheats the white capinchas!" shouted the old cacique, joyously. "Who says that an Abipone girl is not better than a white dog? She has stampeded their horses and escaped."

As if to confirm his assertion, the girl turned her course when she heard the yell, and dashed boldly into the stream, followed by all the horses. As she came, the black lasso of the man on the gray horse was seen to fly in the air and to settle over her shoulders, plucking her from the steed on which she sat.

"Push off! push off!" growled the cacique, savagely. "It is Jaguar Heart again, and by the head of Manco Capac, he shall die now."

The whole of the canoes, nine in number, each holding some twenty Abipone warriors, and paddled by obsequious Guarani, put off into the stream and made their way across.

At this place, the Pilcomayo was some third of a mile in width, the current running about five miles an hour. The dead turtles, floating with the transfixing arrows sticking up in the air, were passed without notice, and the boats were near the middle of the river, when the crack of rifles was followed by the whizzing of bullets, and the huge raft bore down on the canoes, the crew firing rapidly and accurately.

A scene of confusion immediately followed. The Guarani were a very different race from the fierce Abipones. They stood in mortal dread of the firearms of the whites, even more than of their fierce masters. With wonderful unanimity every Guarani dropped his paddle and dived overboard, preferring the risk of drowning to the certain death of bullets.

The Abipones were not discouraged, however. Their warriors picked up some paddles, and stood boldly toward the raft, while the bowmen began to shoot with wonderful rapidity. The old chief and several others sat down in the canoe, caught their great bows between their feet, and drawing them with both hands, sent a flight of arrows, six feet in length, hurtling among the crew of the raft.

But the contest was too unequal to last.

The showers of bullets that came whizzing among the crowded canoes did fearful execution, and when a rifle-ball from the heavy weapon of Don Luis Garcia made a hole in Nabidagua's canoe the size of a man's hand, the overloaded vessel filled and sunk in a moment.

The Abipones, disheartened at the fate of their chief, drew back, and the huge raft glided in between the Indians and the herd of swimming horses.

A moment later Tom Bullard swam alongside, with Malmora a prisoner, and he and the girl climbed on the raft together.

"Let us through, Cap, let us through," cried Plug, excitedly. "She's given her word to make peace for us. You can trust her now, for her father won't fight, if she's in danger."

Malmora was as good as her word. She ran to the

side of the raft, where her countrymen were again concentrating, and addressed them in a speech of such efficacy that a peace was quickly arranged. The Abipones, disgusted with their ill-success, were ready to compromise, and before nightfall the raft was on its way down the river, while Malmora was restored to her friends, and on her road to the inmost recesses of the Chaco.

The adventurers were safe at last, and sunset saw them in the safe territory of Santa Fe.

CHAPTER XXXIII. WELCOME HOME.

A WEEK later the estancia of Don Luis Garcia was in a great state of excitement and festivity. The estanciaero was giving a great feast; the commander-in-chief had loaned him a perfect camp of marquees, oxen were roasting whole for the peons, and all the fashionables of Buenos Ayres were coming to attend the barbecue.

Especially was there a concourse of gay dragoon officers, with bright uniforms, jingling sabers, and horse furniture of velvet, covered with gold lace. The news was spread that the popular Captain Don Alonzo Hernandez, was going to be made a major, and that he was to be married the same day that he received his commission.

The expedition to the Gran Chaco had been a success in the main. At the expense of some twenty killed and wounded, the captain and Don Luis had inflicted terrible losses on the Abipones, and, by the lucky accident of Tom's capture of Malmora, had succeeded in making good terms. Old Nabidagua had been so much disheartened by his final failure, that he had consented to ransom his daughter with a hundred of his best steeds, and their value compensated for all the losses of property sustained by the estanciaero.

"What was the reason, Plug," asked "Kitty," earnestly, as they stood at the door of the estancia house, looking at the preparations, "that you let Malmora go, that night? Wiseman told the captain that you were spoony on her, and that she played roots on you."

"Kitty" was still very pale and weak-looking, but he was able to walk about, and he followed Tom everywhere. Old "Plug" was quite restored to a civilized state now, and you would never have fancied that he had lived among naked savages, as one of them, only a week before. To be sure, his clothes fretted him dreadfully, the first day or two, but as the nights at Buenos Ayres are quite cool, he soon realized the comforts of clothing once more.

Tom looked about on the row of marquees, where the peons were spreading dinner, and his look was much more gloomy than the day seemed to deserve.

"Never you mind, Kitty," he said, in a tone of stifled regret. "I know it wouldn't have done for me to stay among those fellows, but Malmora was a right pretty creature, and when I heard old Hernandez blowing about what he was going to do with her, I felt kind of sorry for the poor little heathen. I helped her to escape, 'tis true; but she fooled me, for she took all the horses, and I was mad enough to eat her. I caught her at last, just in the nick of time, and the poor little thing, even then, tried to persuade me to go with her and leave you. It all passed so quick, I'd hardly time to tell her why I wouldn't go, but she saw I wouldn't, and the plucky creature even then forgave me. If she'd set on those Abipones, they might have hurt us pretty bad. As it was, their arrows killed several of our men. But she actually saved our lives by proposing peace, for they all obeyed her, and old Nabidagua would have given every horse in the tribe to save her. She was a brave girl, and if she'd only have come with us—but never mind. Don't you chaff me about her, Kitty, for she was a good girl as ever stepped, if she was a savage."

And that was the last Tom could be induced to speak about the little Indian princess. "Kitty" respected his silence.

But now the great event of the day took place. The festivities were all conducted in the open air, for in that delightful climate the houses are regarded as mere sleeping-places, and people live out-doors three quarters of the year.

Captain Hernandez, in full uniform, his breast covered with medals and crosses, emerged from the house, leading Dona Inez, who looked perfectly lovely in her bridal attire, and was followed by a troop of bridesmaids. Officers of the dragoon regiment, clattering with sabers and spurs; rich estanciaeros from neighboring farms, gay in embroidered velvets; peons in their Sunday finery, with enormous spurs jingling with little bells; Don Luis in his native costume, with our four lads equipped as miniature estanciaeros; the whole procession gathered in the open space before the estancia, and the horses were brought up. Then was seen the full splendor of a rich estanciaero, for all the horses were furnished by Don Luis Garcia, more than a hundred in number, and all were of a single color, a delicate mouse-tint, greatly esteemed by Buenos Ayreans, and known by the title of *tobinos*, or "otter-like," from their resemblance to the otter.

Don Luis had several such herds, each of one color, and the *tobinos* were the favorite of all.

Now the whole party mounted and rode away in a gay cavalcade, to where the bell of the little chapel on the estancia was peeling its welcome, and whence, an hour after, Dona Inez issued, a new-made bride.

Then there were feasts and dancing on the grass in front of the house, under the great ombu tree, and one sport peculiar to the country, and possible only among a nation of born horsemen.

Don Luis Garcia was the first actor in this, and the feat deserves notice. All the male guests were ranged in a long line on the pampa, on horseback, about twenty feet apart, with their lassoes ready

for use. Don Luis, with a cigarette between his teeth, galloped full speed from one end of this line to the other, at the exact distance of a lasso cast, while every man in the line threw his coiling rope, trying to entangle the legs of the estanciero's horse.

Such was Don Luis's speed and dexterity that he ran the gantlet in safety, till opposite old Sergeant Gonzalez, the best lassoer on the pampas, by repute. Then, just as his horse came floundering head over heels to the earth, the dextrous rider leaped off, and alighted on his feet, still coolly puffing the cigarette, amid a round of applause.

The feat was afterward attempted by several others, but without the success of Don Luis. Most of them fell at the third or fourth cast, and rolled over on the ground; some did not come near enough, and Captain Hernandez, Manuel Garcia and Tom Bullard were the only ones who managed to come on their feet with still lighted cigarettes.

As the lasso party broke up, the sounds of the guitar came from under the ombu tree, and the happy guests were soon whirling in the mazes of fandango and bolero.

There let us leave them, safe and content, for our young readers have doubtless come to the conclusion that, being well out of their troubles, it is time to close our tale of LANCE AND LASSO.

THE END.

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